LOVE SHORT STORIES

25¢

AUG.

BLACKMAIL Kisses

by VIRGINIA NIELSEN

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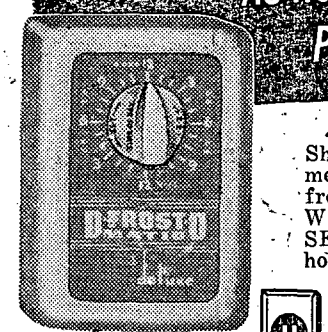
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Just Plug in

D-FROST-O MATIC

Women won't let you take it out!

REVOLUTIONARY NEW DEVICE PAYS YOU $5.00 AND MORE EACH
AS HOUSEWIVES END HAND DEFROSTING FOREVER!
Patented Features Make Selling Easy!



29 MILLION PROSPECTS!!!!

Show housewives how to *end forever* the mean, nasty, time-wasting work of hand-defrosting refrigerators. Get a new thrill! Watch patented D-Frost-O-Matic SELL ITSELF! Cash in up to $18.00 and more an hour. Make $5.00 to $6.50 on each easy demonstration.

29,000,000 prospects eager to buy! Great AUTOMATIC unit converts ANY electric refrigerator to the new-self-defrosting type!

End This Forever!

EXCLUSIVE ADVANTAGES

- Defrosts automatically EVERY NIGHT.
- All-Aluminum case—a precision instrument.
- Works in ANY POSITION.
- Underwriters' Laboratories approved.
- Special single cord—no tangling wires.
- *Patented construction features.*
- Guaranteed two full years.
- Fully adjustable—one to six hour defrost time.
- Beautifully finished.
- Exclusive Skip-Defrost.
- Nationally Advertised.

DRAMATIC DEMONSTRATION!

Simply PLUG IN. Demonstrates itself! Once housewives see how "magically" D-Frost-O-Matic saves time—saves food—saves money—they WON'T LET YOU TAKE IT OUT! It defrosts EVERY NIGHT—automatically. No more ice-crusted coils—sloppy kitchen or spoiling food.

Rush coupon today for FREE information about amazing Sure Selling Plan. Easy as making a phone call—clicks with 87 out of 100 prospects in homes, apartments, hospitals. WE SHOW YOU HOW TO MAKE THE BIGGEST MONEY OF YOUR LIFE.

GUARANTEED 2 WAYS

Guaranteed to customer for at least two years.

Guaranteed to YOU—Must sell or YOUR MONEY BACK!

Our Guarantee backed by the largest, finest manufacturer of its type in the world.

D-FROST-O MATIC

JOIN THESE MEN FOR EXCEPTIONAL PROFITS WEEKLY!

Received demonstrator today and sold five units first day out.
James W. Little

Rush me 20 more D-Frost-O-Matics. Customers are calling at my home for them.
Mrs. D. A. Kearney

I sold 96 units in three weeks spare time. Clear profit over $600.00.
John C. West

Sold first 6 D-Frost-O-Matics in 2 hours. Had no previous experience. It's wonderful.
Leon B. Davis

I sold 19 out of first 20 calls. D-Frost-O-Matic is finest appliance I ever handled.
George L. Dunivant

Act now—territories going fast

D-Frost-O-Matic Corp.
6 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. PF-8
Chicago, Illinois

RUSH COUPON NOW!

D-Frost-O-Matic Corp.
6 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. PF-8
Chicago, Illinois

Rush me full information on making biggest money of my life with D-Frost-O-Matic, using your amazing Automatic Selling Plan.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

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BUILD A FINE BUSINESS FULL OR SPARE TIME!

Easy to Sell...

AIR-CUSHIONED FROM HEEL TO TOE...

MAKE MONEY FROM THE FIRST HOUR!

FREE SELLING OUTFIT!

Call on folks all around you—show and sell amazing NEW KIND OF SHOE! Hidden elastic in front makes it easy to SLIP-OFF . . . no more broken laces or wrinkled tongues! And Built-in EXCLUSIVE Velvet-eez Air Cushioned Insole from heel to toe gives buoyant arch support on resilient, soothing-soft foam rubber!

SLIP ON . . . SLIP OFF!

REPLACEMENT OR A REFUND OF MONEY Guaranteed by Good Housekeeping IF NOT AS ADVERTISED THEREIN

BETTER THAN A RETAIL SHOE STORE OF YOUR OWN!

You can please almost everyone with our more than 150 styles of dress, sport, work shoes for men and women! Fit them CORRECTLY with easy, accurate methods. Draw on stock far bigger than customers could find in MANY stores combined. WE SHOW YOU HOW to fit, sell, build your business!

NATIONALLY ADVERTISED

Big, powerful ads in Good Housekeeping, scores of other national magazines PAVE YOUR WAY! We pay the bills to tell MILLIONS about your Personal Fitting Service. Tie up NOW with the 46-year-old Leader in this big field!

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING GUARANTY SEAL HELPS OPEN DOORS . . . CLINCH SALES!

Women everywhere know and trust the Good Housekeeping Seal on Velvet-eez shoes. Neither you nor your customers can lose—and you have everything to gain.

DOUBLE YOUR PROFITS WITH GREAT WOMEN'S LINE!

CASH IN on fast-sellers like this Velvet-eez Air Cushion Insole Casual—worn and wanted by women from 16 to 60! Sizes 4 to 10, widths AA to EEE. Brings restful RELIEF from "Housework Feet"! Write for FREE Selling Outfit Today.

FOLLOW THESE MEN TO EXCEPTIONAL EARNINGS!

"I have been a salesman for thirty years, but I never thought selling could be so easy and pleasant. I HAVE A PAYDAY EVERY DAY I WORK. All I do is hand a new customer a sample and ask if he ever wore Velvet-eez Air Cushion shoes. I never forget to mention the way to give correct fit." —W. M. Evans, Louisiana.

"For the past four years my average earnings have been around $80.00 per week! I couldn't have done it if it hadn't been for the liberal commissions paid by the Company on this wonderful line of shoes and garments that really is above and beyond competition." —Charles Tuttle.

Velvet-eez AIR CUSHION SELLS SHOES FAST!

You just say: "Feel that Cushion!" When they do — THEY WANT, THEY BUY! Everybody wants COMFORT—RUSH YOUR NAME for FREE Selling Outfit Today!

RUSH COUPON NOW!

MASON SHOE MFG. CO., Dept. M-680
Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

RUSH Free Selling Outfit including easy-to-sell Air Cushioned SLIP-ON, SLIP-OFF shoe, Velvet-eez Ten Second Demonstrator, fast selling Women's styles. Show me how to Build a Fine Business, starting in Spare-Time. Send everything FREE and PREPAID. My own shoe size is (.....)

Name .....

Address .....

City and State .....

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.
Dept. M-680, Chippewa Falls, Wis.

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25 CENTS

LOVE SHORT STORIES

Vol. 31, No. 4 August, 1950

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His line was good—but he handed out carbon copies!

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Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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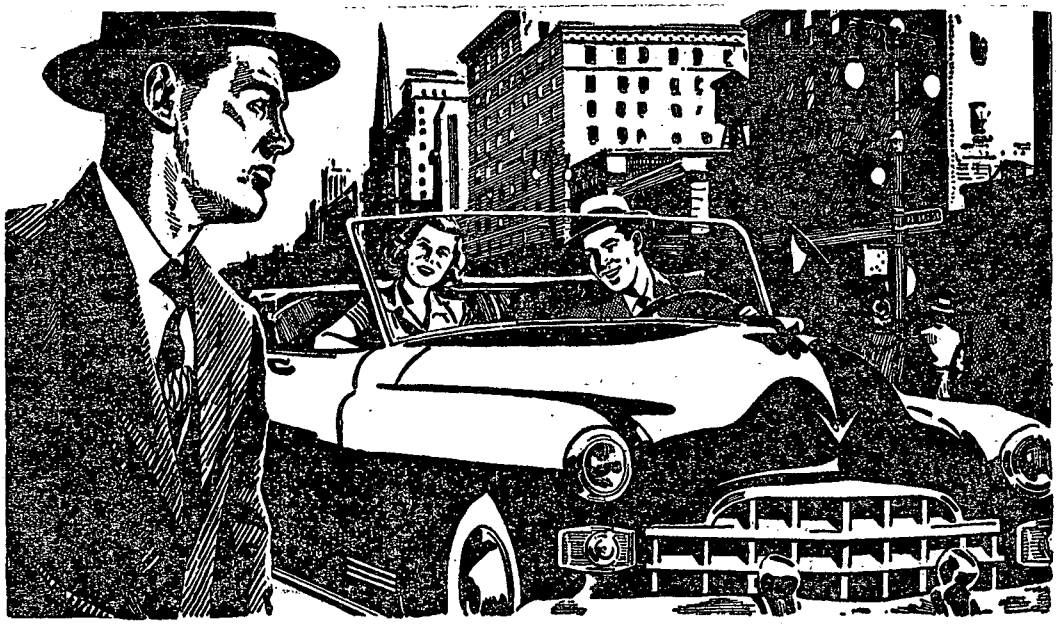

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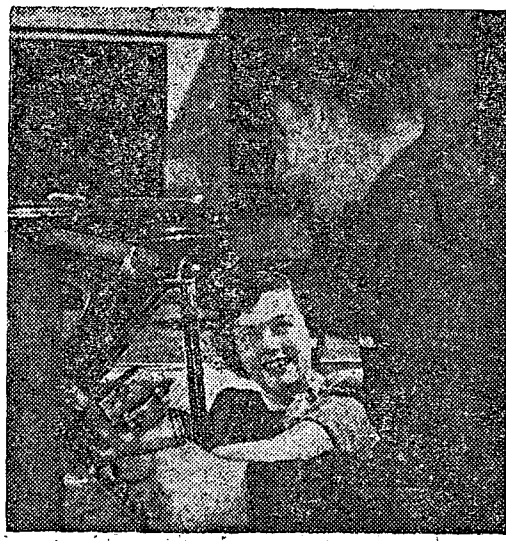

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Love Short 'N Sweet

Dear Editor:

. . . . I just wanted to tell you along with the subscription department that I am renewing my subscription to *Love Short Stories* for two more years. I couldn't decide between a subscription again or buying the magazine on the newsstand. But then I thought it over and decided that it is much easier to have you send my copy than to take a chance on not getting it at the stand. If my newsdealer sold out his allotment of *Love Short Stories,* then I wouldn't be able to get a copy because I live in a very small town and there is only one dealer.

I enjoy *Love Short Stories* very much and have been reading it for years.

Mrs. John Caldwell
New Mexico

Dear Editor:

I don't know how long this will take to arrive at your desk but I did want to tell you how much I enjoyed the July issue of *Love Short Stories.* I enjoy all of them of course, but that one in particular because most of my favorite authors were represented. I always like stories by Helen Ahern, Bill Severn, Hope Campbell and Rhoda Hall. Miss Hall's stories are so delightful.

Sara Whitehall
Australia

Dear Editor:

A compliment from South Africa. Your pattern department is the feature I look forward to most of all in *Love Short Stories.* Down here where I live, we can get patterns but usually they are very old ones and not very chic. Of course, by the time I receive the magazine and then send for the pattern, quite a few months have elapsed. But I still get this year's styles.

Too, I get an idea of what is being worn in the United States. Sometimes, I design my own patterns from your modes.

Pamela Welken
South Africa

Dear Editor:

A reader gets curious at times about the authors and the artists. Why don't you give the readers a little piece on your writers and artists, just a little about them, and maybe print a picture too?

Mary Wright
South Dakota

For the inside story about our authors and artists, read Love Book *magazine, another Popular Publications love story magazine we are sure you will enjoy too.*

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They Never Knew It Was SO EASY To Play

Thousands Now Play Popular Songs Who Didn't Know a Note of Music Before

You, too, can learn your favorite instrument at home, without a teacher, this quick, easy, money-saving way

THINK of the fun YOU are missing! The popularity, friendship, good times! Why? Because you think it's *hard* to learn music. You have an idea that it's a slow, tedious task, with lots of boring drills and exercises.

That's not the twentieth-century way! Surely you've heard the news! How people all over the world have learned to play by a method so simple a child can understand it—so fascinating that it's like playing a game. Imagine! You learn *without a teacher*—in your spare time at home—at a cost of only a few cents a day! You learn by the famous print-and-picture method—every *position*, every move before your eyes in big, clear illustrations. You CAN'T go wrong! And best of all, you start playing real tunes almost at once, from the very first lesson.

No needless, old-fashioned "scales" and exercises. No confused, perplexing study. You learn to play by playing. It's *thrilling, exciting, inspiring!* No wonder hundreds of thousands of people have taken up music this easy way. No wonder enthusiastic letters like those reproduced here pour in from all over the world.

Sound interesting? Well, just name the instrument you'd like to play and we'll prove you CAN! (Instruments supplied when needed, Cash or Credit.) Mail the coupon or write. Do it now!

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC
3678 Brunswick Bldg.
New York 10, N. Y.

Learned Quickly at Home. "I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time." *H. C. S., Calif.

Music is the magic key to friendship, fun, romance. The person who can play a musical instrument is always sure of a welcome. Why not let music open up a new world for you. Thousands have discovered unexpected pleasure and profit in music, thanks to the unique method that makes it amazingly easy to learn.

Send for FREE Booklet and Print and Picture Sample

See for yourself how this wonderful self-instruction method works. Sit down, in the privacy of your own home, with the interesting illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home." No salesman will call—decide for yourself whether you want to play this easy way.—52nd year.

Invited to Parties. "Before I took your course I didn't know one note of music. Then three months later I started to play for dances. I've been invited to many parties. The course is easy and interesting." *R. M. Vancouver, B. C.

Well Worth Money. "The course is fully self explanatory. When one is finished with it how I do it. There is little one need if I learn. It is well worth the money and I fully believe you have the finest course on the market today." *R. E. G., Clarksburg, W. Va.

Surprised Friends. "People who hear me play don't understand I haven't had lessons from a teacher. To their surprise they find I haven't. I'm glad to be a student of your School." *F. H. Athol, Kans.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by Professional models

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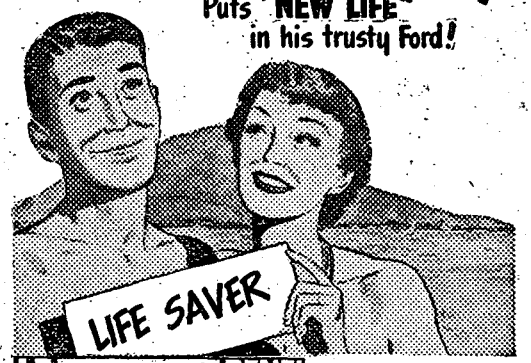

ON SUNDAY THE GANG IS GOING UP TO SWAN LAKE. WHY DON'T WE GO ANY PLACE ANY MORE?
CAN'T HELP IT, DEAR. WHEN A FORD HAS AS MANY MILES AND YEARS ON IT AS OURS HAS, IT NEEDS REPOWERING

I FIGURE THERE'S NO SENSE IN NOT GETTING THE BEST—THAT'S WHY I CAME HERE TO GET AN AUTHORIZED RECONDITIONED ENGINE FOR MY FORD
YOU'RE RIGHT! IT'S RISKY NOT GETTING THE GENUINE ARTICLE: IT'S LOW-PRICED AND WE CAN WORK OUT AN EASY PAYMENT PLAN FOR YOU
DAVE, IT RUNS LIKE A NEW CAR! WE'LL BE UP AT SWAN LAKE BY THE TIME THE REST OF THE GANG GETS THERE!
YOU SAID IT, HONEY! AND NOW OUR CAR WILL LAST US FOR MANY MORE THOUSANDS OF MILES
YOUR GUARANTEE
• Parts reconditioned or replaced with Genuine Ford Parts
• Guaranteed by Authorized Reconditioner
• See your Ford Dealer or Independent Garage this week!
Reconditioned by Authorized Reconditioner

TO JOIN—Write me a letter about yourself, your school or work, your hobbies and pastimes, in fact the sort of letter which will make readers want to write to you. Sign a nickname, but also give me your real name and address plainly written. You will be given a number under which you will find your letter published in Love Short Stories.

TO WRITE TO A PAL—Select someone who interests you, and write your letter, signing your own name and address so the reply will come direct to you. Put this into a STAMPED ENVELOPE, but DO NOT SEAL THIS ENVELOPE. On the corner of this envelope write the number of the Pal you wish it forwarded to. Put this envelope and your letter in another envelope, and address this one to Dora Dean, Love Short Stories, 210 East 43rd St., New York City 17. You may write several Pals if you wish, but be sure to enclose a stamped envelope for each.

Notify Dora Dean at once of any change in address, giving your number, old and new address.

L-4325 PHARMACIST

Here is a lonesome pharmacy student who would like to hear from girls seventeen to twenty-two. I am not quite twenty-two, am five feet eleven, have dark hair and eyes. Like music, cards, swimming, and photography. Play the saxophone a little. Will answer all letters.

Bill

L-4326 FIREFIGHTER

I am a firefighter and I am eighteen years old, six feet two, have blue eyes, have blond hair and wear glasses. I would very much like to have some girls write to me. Like dancing, sports and motoring. Will answer all letters.

Tim

L-4327 LOVES DOGS

This eighteen year old–girl is from a small town in the South. I like to go to church, and read books of all types. Don't have much time to make friends and would like to hear from lots of people. I love animals, especially dogs.

Pea

L-4328 SCOTSMAN

Here is a nineteen year old Scotsman who hopes there a[illegible]me Ameri-

(Please turn to page 76)

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Blackmail Kisses

By VIRGINIA NIELSEN

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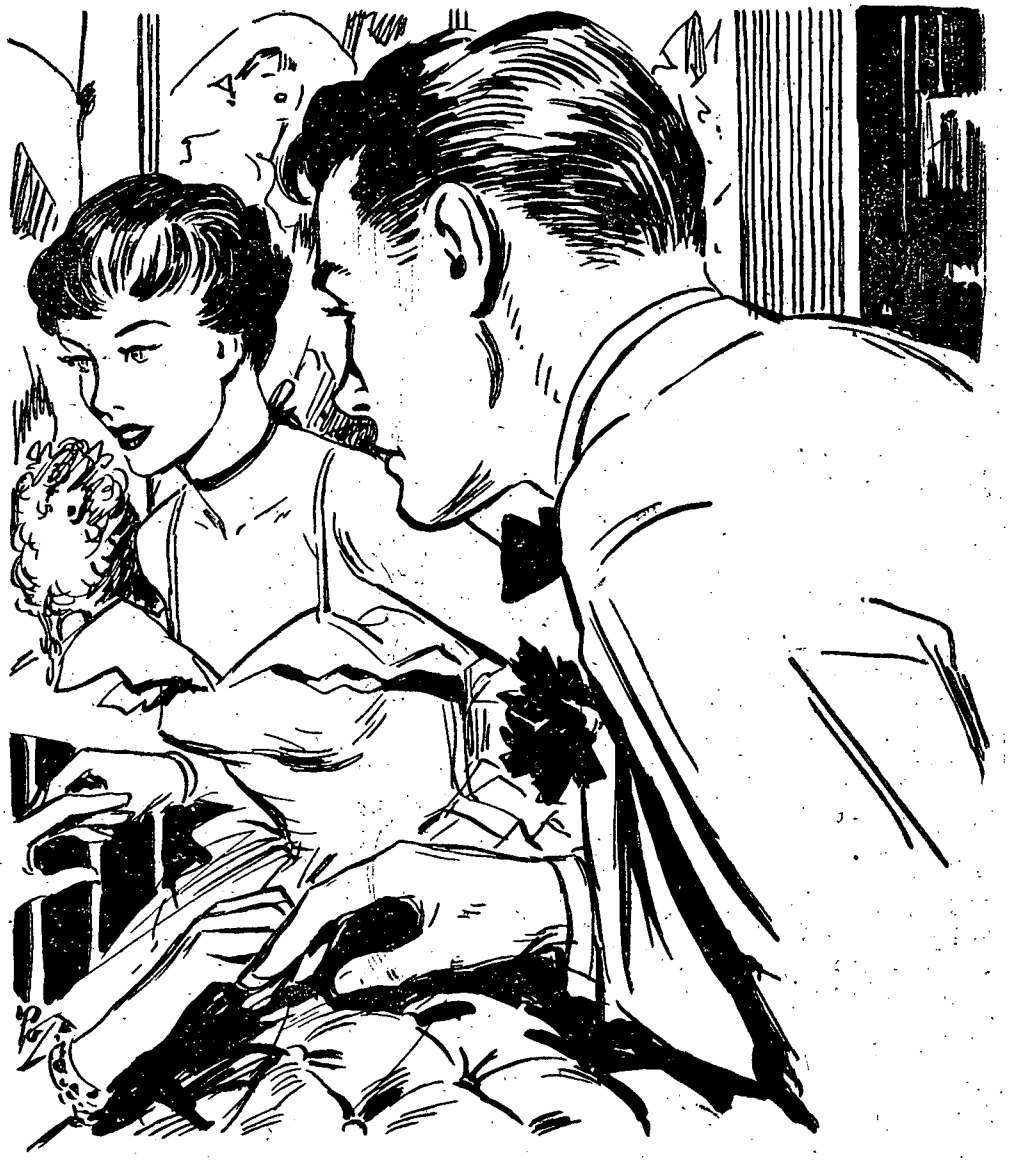

A man's kiss is the best answer to the question of who he loves.

THE BREEZEWAY was the coolest spot in the house. Molly sat Indian fashion on the tile floor in front of her beloved radio, listening to the milk chocolate voice of Perry Como, trying to lose herself in the world his sweetly sad songs were creating.

She had the wire recorder on, so she could preserve every syllable of this. It was her hobby—lately almost her obsession—recording all her favorite radio

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programs. She had spools and spools of wire covered with Perry Como, the old master, Bing, and Mel Tormé.

Nights when she couldn't sleep, she came out here in her pajamas and robe and played them over and over, ever so softly, so no one else in the house could hear.

Lately it was increasingly hard—even with the help of Perry and Mel and Bing—to shut out the real world, the world of her own that had become so bitterly unsatisfactory.

Voices pierced the fog of music in her ears now. Two voices, one deep and laughing, the other soft, a little breathless. The voices of two people in love.

Oh was it love?

She tried hard to ignore them but her heart had heard and her heart began its familiar shameful pounding.

"Molly? Is that you, child?"

Child!

She bent closer to the radio, willing herself not to hear. But Astrid's high heels struck the tile and clicked sharply toward her, followed by other heavier steps.

"Oh, there you are!" That was Astrid, her sister, with the Scandinavian name and the Latin American beauty, tall and languorous, with gardenia skin and ebony hair and a mouth like a ripe red poppy.

"Hi, kitten." And that was Bill Woodhouse from next door, who had always called her his kitten and who she used to think was the most wonderful person in the whole world.

"Hi, Bill," Molly said, secretly amazed that her voice could sound so airy and carefree. "How's the blushing bride, Astrid?"

The blushing bride. Say the bitter words. Say them often—over and over until the sound of them is no longer a knife in your heart. Did her face show what was going on inside of her, Molly wondered?

Astrid was annoyed by the phrase. After all, she had been a bride once before. "Really, Molly, flippancy isn't becoming to you. I do wish you would grow out of that awkward age."

Molly's eyes flashed. Awkward age, indeed! Ten years was ten years, but it didn't entitle Astrid to be quite so maternal! Then abruptly, pity took the place of her brief anger. Poor Astrid, she thought. Poor, poor Astrid. Couldn't she see?

Her sister was twenty-seven but her exquiste figure and her striking beauty made her look much younger than that. And she was wealthy, Molly reminded herself with a heavy heart. Her husband, a man older than herself, had been killed in the war, leaving Astrid a nice fortune.

Molly's and Astrid's parents were both dead. There were only the two of them—or rather there would soon be three.

"Take to Bill while I change," Astrid commanded, "and do try to be pleasant for a change."

Molly shrugged and turned her back on them, idly picking up her tennis racquet from a chair and turning it over in her hands. After a hesitation that betrayed her irritation, Astrid's sharply echoing heels carried her out of the breezeway.

Molly looked across the garden at the house that had been Bill's father's and that Bill was selling now that his father was dead. Absentmindedly, she slapped her hands against the racquet in tune to the music from the radio.

"Your recorder is still on," Bill said.

She turned back to the radio and snapped it off. "I'm always forgetting it," she complained.

SILENCE fell between them, stretching taut. Bill cleared his throat. "Playing lots of tennis these days?"

"I play with Hank Parsons quite a lot."

"Parsons, eh?"

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There seemed to be nothing more to say after that. Molly could feel the tension pulling at her nerves. The silence had grown almost unbearable when Bill said, "You don't like me much any more, do you, Molly?"

"No," she said. Just that and nothing more. It was true. You didn't like a man when you were suffering agonies over loving him. And when you were quite sure he was marrying your widowed sister for her money.

"Why?"

"Does it matter?" She flung aside the tennis racquet as if it didn't please her any more, either.

"Well, rather," Bill said awkwardly. "After all, we will soon be related."

She faced him, her young face desperate. He was so tall, so clean-looking, so ruggedly handsome, you wouldn't believe he could be anything but fine and honorable!

"I'll be your kid sister," she mocked him. "There's almost ten years difference between Astrid and me. Did you know I'll be eighteen next month?" She paused, then added with young cruelty, "You're twenty-two, aren't you, Bill?"

Slowly, deliberately, he went through the motions of lighting a cigarette, avoiding her eyes. She saw that his hand shook a little and her gaze widened while a wild, shameful hope leaped in her heart.

She moved closer to him, her pulse thudding. "Why is your hand trembling, Bill?" she asked softly.

He was very busy with his cigarette which seemed to be trying to go out.

"Bill," she said, "do you think I am beautiful?"

He looked her over, his eyes traveling from her scuffed flats up her long legs in the blue jeans to her stormy white face under the close-cropped dark hair.

"I think," he admitted, "that with care you might be a beauty some day."

"Don't hedge!" she said. "You respond to me. I can tell! You can't be as much in love with Astrid as you pretend. Why are you marrying her?"

"You're a precocious youngster, aren't you?" he said angrily.

"Yes!" she snapped. "In fact, I'm practically an adult!"

"Then would you be adult enough to mind your own business?"

Astrid called from her bedroom, "Molly!"

"Yes?"

"Come here, dear."

UNWILLINGLY, Molly went inside and down the hall to her sister's bedroom. Astrid sat at her dressing table in a long clinging negligée with a staggering array of sweet-smelling bottles and jars before her. Her midnight hair hung over her shoulders.

She looked at Molly, her dark eyes perplexed. "Were you quarreling with Bill?"

"Yes."

"I don't know what has come over you," Astrid complained. "You used to like him. You simply must try to get along with him. After all, we are going to be living in the same house."

"Do you have to remind me?" Molly cried, the cry in her heart for once breaking past her lips.

Astrid looked up, so startled that Molly wondered in a swift panic if she had given herself away. Her sister swung around to face her.

"I wish I could understand you," she said angrily. "Just why are you so upset about my marrying Bill, anyway?"

"For one thing, he is years younger than you are!"

"Five years," Astrid corrected her, pressing her lips together. She glanced at her reflection in the mirror and added, rather complacently, "If it makes any difference."

"Of course it makes a difference!"

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Molly retorted hotly, and with emphasis.

"What difference does it make? Five years are nothing! If they don't matter to us, why should they matter to you?"

To us! Molly tried to swallow the pain that it brought to her throat.

"It doesn't make so much difference now, maybe," she suggested desperately.

Astrid turned back to her mirror with a gesture of distaste, but Molly plunged on, "Besides, you and Bill decided to marry in quite a hurry, didn't you?"

"What if we did?"

"I just don't get it," Molly said. "Bill came home from college because of his father's death. And his father's funeral is barely over when you plan a wedding."

Her sister's dark eyes had gone cold. "What are you trying to say?"

"Did you ever think that it might be your money Bill wants?" Molly asked thickly. She had to say it! "You know George Adams told us his father left no estate and how surprised everyone was. And Bill has to sell the house—"

Astrid was pale with anger. "After all, I am still attractive," she said icily. "I don't have to buy a husband."

Molly was pale too, but she said, "Then why are you doing it?"

Astrid sprang to her feet, a cry on her lips, her hand striking out in sudden thoughtless anger. Molly stared at her in shocked silence, her hand going to her smarting cheek.

Her sister's face crumpled. "Oh, Molly, I didn't mean to do that! Why do you have to be so hateful, when tomorrow is my wedding day?"

Molly knew why. But she knew too that it wasn't any use. She turned out of the room and marched back to the breezeway.

Bill watched her come with stormy eyes. "Sit down," he ordered, sounding both miserable and angry, "and let me try to talk some sense into that young head of yours."

Her eyes slid blindly over him. She picked up her tennis racquet in passing. "Sorry, got a date," she threw thickly over her shoulder, and somehow got out of the sight of him.

She must just as well resign herself to the wedding, she told herself as she cut across the carpet of lawn. If only she could find the strength to get through the next day, and after that, all the days.

"SAY!" Hank Parsons protested. "You're murderous with that racquet today!"

"Is that bad?" Molly said tightly.

He came to the net, an engaging grin creasing his face. "You don't have to hit the ball as if it were your only swipe at a deadly scorpion! And how about a smile, just once?"

"Oh, don't preach at me, Hank!" she said crossly. "Can't I enjoy a vile mood without your trying to cheer me up?"

"Go ahead and wallow then," he offered. "But won't you tell me why?"

"Do I have to have a reason?"

"Are you kidding? On a day like this? With Astrid's wedding party only a day away? Champagne and music and much hoopla? And you the fetching bridesmaid and all?"

She slashed the air with her raquet. "Is this a game or a talking marathon?" she demanded. "Ready? It's my serve."

"Wait a minute!" Hank said. "Light dawns. Is it that old 'always a bridesmaid' gag? Could it be that you're feeling neglected because Astrid's snagged herself a second husband before you've picked your first?"

"Oh, don't talk such rot!" she said angrily, but color was staining her face. He had come that near the mark.

Hank leaped the net and came toward her. "Listen, Molly," he said softly, "did I ever tell you you're at the head of my list? It's a little early for us to be thinking of such things, but do you want to

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know that when the time comes to buy rings and find a minister and a house and lot and all those things, I'll start camping on your doorstep?"

She felt all twisted up inside with the pain and the pity of it. Hank was a nice boy. An awfully nice boy. "You mustn't talk like that, Hank. You mustn't!"

"I'm not asking you yet, Molly, darling. But doesn't it make you feel better to know that I will?"

She caught a deep breath and from somewhere dragged up a smile for him. "It makes me feel very much better, Hank. And now get back to your court. I'm going to burn it up!"

She relaxed a little and threw herself into the game. Let tomorrow look after itself, she told herself sternly.

THE DAY dawned sunny and clear. Molly woke in her room with the ruffled muslin curtains to a cloudy feeling of unreality.

She had always been a little in love with Bill Woodhouse. When she was in pigtails, she had followed him everywhere, to his intense annoyance.

Later, as he grew into his teens, he had treated her with masculine tolerance, fixing her bike brakes for her, helping her train her puppy, slipping her a taste of the forbidden champagne at Astrid's first wedding when her parents weren't looking.

Did he remember that wedding now?

She had wept when he went away to college, and it had made him extremely uncomfortable. He had never returned her adoration, she knew. She had hoped he would someday. No use denying that. Someday when she had grown up into a beauty."

Well, she was practically grown up now, as she had reminded him. And he was marrying Astrid.

Not that that was so bad. It wasn't the five years, really. It was just that she knew Bill so well. And she knew that he did not really love Astrid, not with all his heart the way a man should. Molly was sure of it. And yet he was marrying her this very day.

She lay in her bed, tense and unhappy, and sent up a little prayer. A two-fold prayer. "Please keep it from happening, or else let me not mind it so much!"

There was a knock at the door and Astrid came in, looking quite radiant. "It's a perfect day for a wedding!" she said, and bent over to kiss Molly. "Be happy for me, darling."

Molly couldn't bear it. She rolled over, shutting her eyes tightly and burying her face in her pillow. "I'd like to get another forty winks if you won't mind."

She knew she had hurt her sister. Astrid said, "Don't you want to be my attendant?"

"I don't want to but I will," Molly muttered under her breath, feeling like a worm.

"Thanks!" Astrid's voice was bitter. "It will be a happy wedding party, I must say. George is taking it as badly as you are."

And no wonder, Molly thought. He quite obviously wanted Astrid himself. Why couldn't she have married him? He was so right for Astrid, about thirty and established in his own business, and so devoted to her.

A wave of fellow-feeling for George rippled through Molly's unhappiness. He had probably been as hard hit as she had by the suddenness of Astrid's decision to marry Bill.

"Please get up," Astrid said impatiently. "I want you to dress early so you can help me."

She left the room and Molly clenched her hands beneath the covers, blinking back tears. "If only something would happen to stop it!" she thought again. "I can't bear it!"

It was only a moment later that some-

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thing did happen. Astrid's cry came at almost the same time as Molly heard the heavy thud. She sprang out of bed and in her pajamas ran through the living room to the breezeway.

Her sister lay where she had slipped on a rug on the freshly waxed tiles. One leg was twisted under her and her face was startlingly pale.

"I think I've broken it," Astrid said. "You'd better call Bill." And then she fainted.

BUT AS it happened it was George Adams who took charge. Molly heard his step on the walk even as she bent over Astrid's limp form, and never before had his round, kind face been such a welcome sight.

Even in her anxiety Molly noticed his sudden pallor when he saw Astrid. "Don't try to move her," he cautioned, as he stepped to the telephone to call a doctor. "Get a blanket."

Molly hastened to obey. He took the cover from her when she returned, and she noticed how gentle his hands were as he spread it over Astrid where she lay, and how they trembled slightly.

But there was an unguarded look in his eyes when he turned them up to her. "There'll be no wedding tonight," he said. And horror swept over Molly as she realized that he, too, must have wished for something to prevent the wedding.

We're to blame, she told herself, in an agony of guilt and uncertainty. We wished this to happen! How could she face either Bill or Astrid again?

It was a dreadful day. By nightfall Astrid was back in her own bed, because the hospital was full, but there was a nurse with her and her leg was in a cast.

An opiate had dulled her pain, but there was no opiate for what Molly was suffering. She was so sorry for Astrid she could hardly bear it, and she was all twisted up with her feelings of guilt. Yet in spite of everything she couldn't help feeling a relief that the wedding had been postponed—and she hated herself for that.

George Adams said, "Molly, get some rest. You're as pale as Astrid is tonight."

They were in the living room. Bill had gone into the bedroom to tell Astrid good night.

"You look fagged yourself, George," Molly said.

He gave her a tired smile. "It's been one of those days, hasn't it? I'll be going now, Molly. I'll stop in to see if you are both all right before I go to the office in the morning."

"Thanks, George." Molly walked to the door with him. It was a hot, muggy evening but the night air outside seemed refreshingly cooler than the house. Impulsively she stepped outside and walked with him toward his car, in the drive. The way led past Astrid's bedroom window, wide open.

It hadn't occurred to Molly that they would be able to hear what was being said inside until the sound of Bill's voice reached them. Molly turned quickly, but not before she had heard a sentence that astounded her.

Bill wasn't comforting Astrid, or making love to her. He was talking business. What he had said was, "I'll bring a power of attorney for you to sign."

Molly looked a startled question at George Adams, but he must not have heard. Quickly she told him good night and returned to the living room.

A moment later Bill entered the room. When he saw Molly, his face changed. It seemed to her that he made it deliberately expressionless.

"Hello," he said. "I thought you would be in bed."

"George just left."

"Oh, of course." He seemed a little rattled. "I'll say good night, too, then."

Molly looked at him levelly. "What is a power of attorney?"

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She was not mistaken this time. A wary look leaped to his eyes. "A power of attorney," he said guardedly, "gives another person permission to act for you in your business affairs."

"You are going to act for Astrid?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do?"

He met her look, his lips tightening. "That is between Astrid and myself, isn't it?"

Molly felt slightly sick. It seemed to her that this was confirmation of all she had suspected. The wedding had been postponed, but Bill couldn't wait to get his hands on Astrid's money.

She went a little mad then, the hurt of it was so great. She stepped toward him, lifting her face, pale and desperate.

"I have some money too, Bill," she said on a ragged breath. "It's a trust fund, but it will be mine the day I marry. Does that tempt you, Bill?"

He paled queerly beneath his tan. For a moment there was such a stillness that she could hear her heart pound. Then he said bitterly, "You think well of me, don't you?"

"You know what I think. I think you are not in love with Astrid."

He made no denial. He stared down at her with eyes so somber and strange that she felt a sudden surge of power. She stepped closer to him, her heart pounding, and lifted her lips.

"I dare you, Bill," she taunted him softly. "I dare you!"

FOR A tense second he looked down at her, neither moving nor speaking. Then he seized her shoulders and shook her as if in anger. But abruptly he pulled her toward him and his lips crushed hers while the grasp of his hands burned through the material on her shoulders. An exquisite and almost painful warmth flowed through her and she felt as if the very room were rocking beneath her, so momentous his rapturous kiss seemed to her.

Then, almost as abruptly, he released her and turned to go. Shaken and trembling, she stared bewilderedly after him, realizing he meant to go without another word.

"Bill!" she said. "Bill!"

He paused and turned, his eye unreadable. "Well?"

"You—you kissed me—" she stammered.

His face darkened. "What if I did? Any man would have done the same."

Pale and stunned, she watched him go. All her suspicions returned, intensified. Oh, but he was lower than she had dreamed, she thought bitterly. He could kiss her behind Astrid's back like that and think nothing of it!

She caught her breath on a sob. How could a girl be so mistaken about a man she had known almost all her life?

When she went into Astrid's room, her sister opened her eyes. "Does it hurt much?" Molly asked her.

"Not much, but I can't sleep. Has Bill gone?"

"Yes."

"You'll sleep," the nurse said reassuringly. "The doctor gave me a sedative to give you. I'll get some water."

When she had left the room, Molly said in a strained voice, "Astrid, do you mind telling me why you are giving Bill a power of attorney?"

Her sister's head turned impatiently on the pillow. "Oh, for heaven's sake, it's only a formality! Bill knows more about my affairs than I do. His father was my husband's executor, you know."

The nurse came back. "You'd better say good night now, Miss Molly."

Molly went to her own room, but not to sleep.

In the morning her sister was in a very difficult mood. "I can't let Bill see me like this!" she wailed querulously, when

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Molly went to her room. "I'm a sight! Molly, you've got to help me."

There were dark circles under her eyes and little lines of pain in her face. For the first time Molly could remember, she looked her age.

"If Bill really loves you—" Molly began. Her voice choked over the words but Astrid was too distraught to notice that.

She cried irritably, "Oh, don't start that! Bring me my cosmetic case. You can try to give me a facial and brush my hair for me—"

The phone beside her bed rang. She picked it up and said, in a very different voice, "Hello? Oh, hello, darling—not well, but better. In a half hour. Bye."

Molly's efforts did help and when Bill came, her sister looked, if not quite herself, still very appealing in her pretty bed-jacket with her black hair gleaming against the white pillows.

Bill avoided Molly's eyes and she made an excuse to get out of the room quickly. For a few moments she paced the living room, but when she found herself digging her nails into her palms in tension, she fled to the garden where she could not see Bill leave.

LATER IN the day she learned that Bill had gone into town with Astrid's power of attorney.

The days that followed were difficult ones. Bill ran in at all hours from next door, and Astrid, well enough to be restless at the confinement of her cast and already bored with reading, was continually in an unpleasant mood.

From avoiding each other, Bill and Molly progressed until they were entering into a strange partnership to keep Astrid amused. They played three-handed bridge on her tray. They invented games and they vied with each other in telling her jokes. By unspoken agreement they showered her with compliments.

But the old camaraderie they had once known was lost, and they could not entirely conceal from Astrid the strain they were under, spending so much time in the close quarters of her room.

She did not see the glances that sometimes caught and held, until Molly's cheeks flamed and her pounding pulses drowned the sound of Astrid's voice. Or the shiver that went through her if Bill's hand, by accident, touched hers.

But she began to feel that Bill was bored. That was why she insisted that Molly go with him to the dance at the country club on Saturday night.

Molly, tense and nervous with the strain she was under, was near the breaking point when they paraded before Astrid, Molly in her crisp white cotton formal, and Bill looking darkly tanned and very handsome in his summer tuxedo.

She would have liked to refuse to go, but she felt in a way that it was punishment she had earned for wishing for something to spoil Astrid's wedding plans.

Astrid was being the beautiful martyr. "Have a good time for me," she told them wistfully, holding out a hand to each. She pulled Molly down for a good night kiss, then lifted her face to Bill.

Molly turned sharply away but not before she had seen the dull red flare into Bill's face.

In the car, she sat far over on her side, looking unseeingly out her window as the familiar houses slid by. Bill drove straight to the club. Not once did he break the silence.

There were quick, interested glances when they entered the club together, for Astrid's accident on what was to have been her wedding day had given all her friends something to talk about. Molly heard some of the whispers as she went stiffly into Bill's arms for the first dance.

"Astrid's younger sister—" "He can't be much older—" "She looks like the bride—"

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She did not know whether Bill heard them or not. His face was wooden. Molly closed her eyes and let herself flow with his steps and tried to think of nothing but dancing.

SHE TRIED to forget that Astrid was lying home alone, that people were staring at them, that this might never happen again. She almost succeeded, for suddenly their feet were moving together with such fluid perfection that she thought, We were made to dance together!

But she could not entirely forget. For the way Bill was suddenly holding her, as he would hold something precious and inexpressibly dear, both thrilled her and angered her, for Astrid's sake.

She both loved and hated him, Molly thought, tormented. And the longer they danced, the more bitter was her torment.

At last Bill said, "I think I'll go and phone Astrid. Do you want to come along?"

"No."

"Where will you wait?"

"In the bar," she said, and started for it.

Bill's hand tightened on her arm. "At least, let me order your drink." He took her in and told the bartender firmly, "A lemonade," then left her sitting staring down into the glass that was put before her. Her hand was suddenly trembling so that she did not dare pick it up.

"You shouldn't wear your heart on your sleeve," someone said beside her.

She turned and saw Hank Parsons. There was a difference in him tonight. She read a bitter knowledge in his eyes and she knew he had guessed her secret.

"Go away," she said ungraciously.

"And let you cry into your drink?" he asked. "I can think of better things than that. Why not dance with me?"

"No," Molly said.

"Do you know what people are saying?"

"I can guess," she said bitterly.

"They are saying that Astrid's accident was very convenient for you and Bill. They are saying that it is obvious you are that way about him. They are saying that you should be the bride—"

"Will you stop?"

"You could stop a lot of their talk by dancing with me."

Unsteadily she lifted her glass and took a large drink. Then she stood up, shaking out the folds in her dress. He was right.

Hank was an expert dancer but it was not like dancing with Bill. That had been sweet agony. She remembered how Hank had chided her that day on the tennis court for not smiling at him. He was deadly serious tonight, as if dancing were the soberest business in the world.

Suddenly she caught sight of Bill in the doorway looking for her. She couldn't bear another dance in his arms! In panic she clutched at Hank's arm.

"Let's go outside and get some air," she suggested.

Hank regarded her with that new soberness. "Good idea," he replied very briefly.

He guided her through the dancers toward the doors opening on the terrace above the swimming pool. They were across the room from where Bill stood and with her last backward glance, Molly saw him still looking around for her, his handsome head lifted to see over the dancers, his blue eyes anxious and searching.

Hank took her down to the edge of the pool, lying still and silvery in the moonlight. Molly shivered and he put his arm around her.

"I was wrong," he said harshly. "It wasn't too soon, was it? It was very nearly too late."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said.

"This," Hank said thickly. "This is what I should have done a long, long time ago."

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HE TOOK her in his arms and kissed her. For a moment there was silence except for the muted strains of the music from the dance floor and the light lap of the water against the tiles beneath them.

Then with a muffled exclamation Molly pulled away from him. She felt shamed and betrayed, because she had kissed Hank when she knew she could never fall in love with him.

"Wait a minute!" Hank said. "This is only the beginning—"

"No, Hank. You were right when you said it was too late—"

"Where are you going?"

"Home."

"Brooding isn't going to do you any good. Let's go back and dance."

"Will you please leave me alone?" she cried, suddenly near tears.

"All right, all right! I'll call you tomorrow."

She walked rapidly away from him in the darkness, staying on the terrace and avoiding the ballroom doors. Suddenly she came face to face with Bill.

Just meeting him unexpectedly like that made her heart pound. To conceal her agitation she asked quickly, "Is Astrid all right?"

He stared down at her as if he had not heard her question. His face was tense with a dark emotion that she responded to against her will. Had he seen Hank kissing her, she wondered?

"Oh, Molly, Molly," he said on a ragged breath.

She didn't know how it happened but she was in his arms and he was kissing her, wild kisses that were poignantly sweet and deeply troubling. For one incredible moment, she was helpless against them, responding with a flame that was greater than her will.

Then she twisted out of his arms. "What kind of man are you, Bill?" she sobbed, and ran, leaving him standing on the terrace. In front of the clubhouse she found a taxi to take her home.

She was up early next morning after an almost sleepless night. She had no eagerness to face Astrid so as soon as she was dressed, she left the house and went for a long walk.

When she came back, looking very young in her striped sports dress with her hair windblown, Bill was sitting in the big chair by Astrid's bed, talking to her as she breakfasted from a tray.

"Good morning!" Astrid called, looking radiantly happy. "The doctor is letting me up today. You and Bill are to take me to the breezeway in a wheelchair."

"Marvelous!" Molly said. She avoided Bill's eyes, but just knowing he was in the room brought a red stain to her cheeks. All she could think of were those wildly sweet moments in his arms, and she trembled, remembering.

There was only one thing to do. She had thought it all out on her long walk. She had to get away from them both. As soon as possible.

"Did you enjoy the dancing last night?" Astrid asked her.

"Not particularly," she said with an elaborate casualness, and her sister's eyes sharpened on her.

"And you, Bill?"

"Dancing with Molly is very nice," Bill said politely, not looking at her. There was more color in his face than usual.

Astrid was silent for a time. Then she said briskly, "Bill, darling, will you leave us while Molly helps me dress? And telephone about that wheelchair, will you? I don't want to wait all day for it."

The door closed behind Bill and Astrid raised her arms to fluff out her lovely dark hair. "We have decided to be married at once," she announced happily.

Molly felt the color drain from her face in spite of her frantic efforts at self-control. She stammered, "But—"

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"Bill says he won't mind a wheelchair wedding. He wants to have everything settled before the end of the month."

EVERYTHING settled. The words had a repellent business-like sound. Oh, he was shameless! Kissing her in dark corners and the very next morning urging Astrid to marry him at once so they could "settle everything." Why couldn't she hate him as he deserved?

I've got to get away, she thought, desperate.

She forced herself to say, "That's wonderful, Astrid!" And added, quite casually, "I think I shall move away after the wedding."

Astrid's eyes widened. "Move away? Don't be ridiculous! Where would you go?"

"I'll find a job and—"

"Molly Barrett, what are you talking about?"

"You know very well what I'm talking about," Molly said, at the end of her rope. "You and Bill won't want me underfoot!"

Astrid's eyes narrowed. She was thoughtful for a long silent moment. Then she said again, "Where would you go?"

"I'd find some place. You could give me an allowance, couldn't you? At least until I find a job?"

Her sister said slowly, "We will have to talk to Bill. About the money, I mean. I've turned everything over to him."

Molly stared at her, her face paling. *"Everything?"*

"Don't look like that," Astrid said irritably. "It will be much simpler. I'll get a check from my estate every month and won't have to worry about business details—"

"Astrid!" Molly said. "You—oh, you're out of your mind!"

Her sister cried in abrupt anger, "You're behaving like an adolescent! I

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wish you would grow up. Get out of my sight! I'm sick of you!"

Molly laughed, a laugh that was bitter and choked. "I'm going!" she said. "I'll go!"

She would go and go and keep right on going. And never come back. But first she would have to ask Bill for money. Please, Bill, may I have some money so I can run away from you?

She was still laughing at that when she answered the telephone from the hall extension. Only it sounded something like a sob.

"Molly?" said Hank. And then, "Still wearing your heart on your sleeve?"

She had a desperate idea then. She said breathlessly, "No, Hank. I've changed my mind about that."

"Good. I'll be around in a half hour or so. Okay?"

"Okay," she said.

As she turned away from the phone, Bill came to the front door. "The wheel chair will be delivered by noon," he said, as she let him in.

"I'll leave her in your hands," Molly said airily, avoiding his eyes. "I am expecting company." She hurried past him, her heart pounding and though she did not look back she heard him pause as his troubled eyes followed her.

SHE WAS in the front yard when Hank drove up in his battered roadster. "How about a picnic?" he called.

Molly went to the car. She drew a deep breath and went straight to the point. "Hank," she said, "will you marry me?"

He blinked with surprise. He tried to keep his voice light but it was a little unsteady as he said, "Did I hear you, sweet?"

The color rushed back to her face in a furious flood. "You heard me!"

He took her hand and squeezed it. "Don't get mad, honey. I just wanted to know what the score is. I—well, frankly, I can't afford to marry just yet. On my allowance—"

"It's my money I want," Molly said tensely. "I've got to get away from here, don't you see? But I can't. I haven't any money unless I marry and then I get what Daddy left. That's all—I mean, that's why—"

"Never mind," he said grimly. "I guessed it wasn't because you had developed a sudden yen for me."

Her lips began to tremble. She turned away from him.

He went on, his voice rough, "But I can take a gamble. If that's what you want, it's all right with me. Have you picked your wedding day?"

She could not speak. She shook her head.

"There's no time like the present, is there?"

She caught her breath and whirled to face him. "You mean—now?"

"Why not?" he said. "Or were you thinking of holding out for a veil with orange blossoms?"

The bitterness in his voice was new. But she could understand it. Violent color flooded her face. "Oh, no!" she said. "No orange blossoms! Wait for me. I'll be right down."

In her room she moved as one in a nightmare, driven, yet not knowing what she was doing.

A picnic, Hank had said. She could say they were going on a picnic if anyone stopped her. She packed a few things in the small bag she used to carry her swim suit and accessories and combed her hair and carefully made up her lips. She dared not change. She would have to be married in her candy-striped sports dress. At the last minute she decided to leave a note.

"By the time you find this," she wrote, "I shall be married—"

Married! It wasn't real. Nothing that

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had happened since Bill's return had been real to her, and this—her own wedding—was the most unreal of all.

She stepped out into the hall with her little bag and listened. She could hear Bill's voice from the direction of the breezeway so she ran lightly out to Hank, waiting in his car.

Sitting beside him as he drove away, she tried to realize that in another hour or two he would be her husband. It frightened her, but she reminded herself that she couldn't have done anything else. She couldn't have endured another day with Astrid when Bill was always around.

The courthouse steps were shallow and worn and there seemed a thousand of them. Molly's feet dragged as she climbed them. Hank's hand tightened on her arm and he said, "This is going to be a surprise to a lot of people, honey." After a pause he added, "Including myself."

They went up more stairs and through a door that was half glass. There, they told a man behind a long counter what they wanted. As in a dream Molly answered the clerk's questions, until, when he asked her age she said automatically, "Seventeen."

There was a startled silence. Hank gave her a black look.

Hastily, she said, "I mean, eighteen."

The clerk studied her. "When is your birthday?" he asked her gently. His eyes were very blue and direct and she found she could not lie to him.

"Next month."

"You will be eighteen next month?"

She nodded.

"Have you your guardian's consent to be married?"

Hank tried to bluff it through. "Of course she has!"

"In writing?" the clerk persisted.

"No," Molly admitted, and there was nothing more Hank could say.

"I'm sorry," the clerk said. "It's the law in this state. You just get a note from your guardian and then bring it back."

They thanked him and left. As they went back down the steps, Hank said, "We can drive into the next county. Don't let a little thing like that worry you. But for Pete's sake, remember you've got to be eighteen."

NUMBLY she went beside him to the car. Just as they reached it, Bill drew up beside them in Astrid's car, coming to a sudden stop. "Molly!" he cried.

He jumped out of the car and stood in their way. His face was frighteningly stern.

"Astrid's housekeeper found your note just after you left," he said. "You're not married?"

Molly shook her head.

"You left a note?" Hank said incredulously. "Did you want to be caught?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't think they would find it so soon."

He regarded her with disgust. "Women!" he said.

Bill opened the door of his car. "Get in," he told Molly. He threw at Hank, "Your father's on his way here."

"Holy cow!" Hank exclaimed, and Molly blushed for him, he sounded so young.

Bill slid under the wheel and they drove away, leaving Hank standing there on the sidewalk. Molly was both anxious and miserable beside Bill. Never had she seen him look so grim.

"You're not in love with him!" he said harshly.

Her hands gripped each other in her lap. "No, Bill. Do you have to ask?"

He was driving fast and they quickly left the houses of the county seat behind. Beside a field of cotton, he pulled off the road and put on the brakes.

"Please go on," Molly begged desperately.

"I can't go on!" he said. "Molly, darling!"

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"Please," she whispered. But he caught her in his arms and held her close, burying his face against her hair in a despairing gesture.

She lay against him for a moment, exhausted with emotion. At last she said, "Astrid—"

"I know," he said, on a long sigh. He straightened, letting her go. "I'll take you home now."

She couldn't believe the evidence of her eyes and her ears. Over and over again he had offered her proof that he was marrying Astrid for reasons other than love. And yet she still couldn't believe he could be that kind of person.

"But first there is something I want to ask of you."

She looked at him, not speaking.

"You think you are in love with me," he said in a low voice, and she winced. "You will get over it. You will find someone else. But, please, Molly, I beg of you, wait, wait until you do! I want your promise that you won't do anything foolish or unconsidered, as you did today."

She did not answer, only looked at him with eyes that were dark in her pale face. Today she had been driven beyond any sane or reasonable judgment and she could not promise she would not be so driven again.

"I want you to be happy, Molly," he said, very low.

That was a laugh!

SHE straightened a little. "Shall I tell you why I was marrying Hank?" she said, speaking carefully. "It was because I get my money from Daddy when I marry. Astrid tells me you will be handling all the money from now on and I didn't want to ask you for money to go away with. But since you've prevented my marriage, I suppose I will have to ask you for an allowance I can live on away from home."

She thought he suddenly looked very tired. "About how much will you need?"

He doesn't even ask where I'm going! Her bitter hurt made her answer flippantly, "That will depend!"

"I think it can be arranged," he said. He bent forward and started the car. In the silence of despair they drove back to the house where Astrid waited.

Bill did not come in. He left the motor running while she climbed out of the car. "Tell Astrid I'll be back," he told her and drove off again.

Molly felt as if she carried the world on her shoulders as she entered the house.

"Molly?" Astrid called from her room, relief and exasperation in her voice. "Bill caught you in time then. What in the world were you thinking of, you little idiot?"

"Skip it," Molly said tiredly from the door.

"But why in the world—"

"Weddings are in the air," she said flippantly.

The ache in her heart was a sharp twisting pain. There was nothing she could do to escape it. It went with her through the house, across the living room and out to the breezeway.

She would never escape it any more. She had to live with it. Live with the knowledge that Bill loved her, that he knew she loved him—and still expected her to get over it while he went right ahead with his wedding to Astrid. How much could a girl stand?

She felt dazed and befogged with pain. Mechanically, she sat down before her radio-recorder. She opened a cabinet door and her hands moved automatically through the stacked and labeled spools of wire.

It would always be like this, she thought dully. Her hands would have to make the motions of living, she would go on breathing, eating, talking, even laughing—and all the while her heart would be dead.

How long could she stand it?

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You will get over it. You will find someone else. Lies! she thought bitterly.

Her hands slowed on an unlabeled spool and dullly she asked herself if she had put it in the wrong cabinet, or if she had failed to write in the programs she had recorded.

STILL ONLY half aware of what she was doing she put the spool on the machine and started to play back the wire. There was a commercial and then Bing's voice began. A program of Bing's record, then. She let it run on, scarcely listening to it.

Her thoughts were running around in a trapped circle, sick and desperate. She would have to take the allowance from Bill in order to go away, and that meant Bill would always know where she was. At no time would she be free of the danger of looking up and seeing him, of picking up a telephone and hearing his voice.

Maybe, someday, she could find a job that would let her be independent of Bill and Astrid, but that time seemed impossibly far off.

How can I stand it? she thought again in blind pain.

The music ground on, and Bing's voice began to irritate her. It was too happy, too carefree. No one had any right to be so carefree! She made a quick impatient movement, about to turn the machine off.

And then her hand was arrested in mid-air. She heard her own voice saying, "Okay, Hank! Wait-ll I get my racquet!" And her quick running steps sounded through the song.

She had gone off to play tennis and left the recorder going then. It was a careless trick she had pulled before. An idle curiosity stirred in her as she wondered what the machine had picked up in her absence. A lot of commercials, no doubt, perhaps a hillbilly band or two. The thing must have run for several hours.

She remembered that afternoon she had gone off to the courts with Hank very well, for it had been on her return that she had heard from Astrid's lips of her engagement to Bill.

She reached up as a commercial came on, but when a song she liked followed immediately, she let her hand drop and leaned her head against the machine, listening, trying not to think.

One record program followed another and she still sat on the floor, letting the music drug her whipped senses.

She stirred as footsteps and voices sounded in the background of the recording again. Then abruptly she sat up straight as she recognized Bill's voice. He had obviously been following Astrid out on the breezeway, for his recorded voice gradually became louder and all at once she was able to distinguish words.

"—if you will let me repay you, month by month." Molly was astounded by the note of pleading in his deep tones.

"How are you going to do that secretly?" It was Astrid's voice, full of a light, cruel scorn. "Don't be silly! Do you think someone wouldn't find out? What would happen to my reputation then?"

The music ground on. Molly leaned closer to the speaker. At last she heard heard Bill's reluctant answer.

"I hadn't thought of that."

"Now if you were to marry me—" A shocked gasp escaped Molly. She had her ear against the speaker. Even through the music she heard the soft coaxing note in Astrid's voice. "I could turn all my affairs over to you, give you a power of attorney. No one would question any deposits you made to my account—"

Music. Nothing but music. Molly waited in an agony of suspense. Then she heard, "Is that your price?"

There was another pause. Then Astrid's voice, soft and breathy, "Kiss me, Bill!"

"Oh, no, no!" Molly cried clapping her hands over her ears. It just wasn't possible. But that was blackmail! Astrid

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wouldn't do that—why she just couldn't—

Molly reached up and turned the rewind switch. The wire sang backward and after a moment she flipped it forward again. The voices returned with a sickly familiarity.

"Is that your price?"

"Kiss me Bill!"

She hadn't imagined those voices. She could still hear their echo. Bill's stiffly reluctant. Astrid's shamelessly seductive.

She moaned, "Oh, Astrid, how could you?"

"How could I what?" Astrid said dryly. Molly hadn't realized until then that she'd spoken aloud. The rubber wheels of Astrid's wheel chair were just carrying her into the breezeway.

COURAGE CAME to Molly in a warm flood. She sprang to her feet and reversed the wire again, letting it go far enough to begin at the start of the conversation she had unknowingly recorded. She turned the volume up loud. And then she stood with her back to the machine, her hands out in a gesture of protection.

"Listen!" she flung at her sister. "Listen!"

The music screeched. The voices shouted. Astrid's lovely face whitened as she heard them.

What would happen to my reputation?

I hadn't thought of that.

Now if you were to marry me—

"Stop it!" she screamed at Molly. "Stop that thing!" She came at them, Molly and the machine, in her wheelchair, but Molly held her off. Astrid's leg was still in a cast, and she couldn't get out of the chair without help. If she could have, Molly realized, she would have smashed her precious recorder to bits.

She screamed at her, "Do you want to ruin me? Everybody in the block can hear that thing!"

"You did this," Molly told her grimly. "I didn't do anything. I'll turn it off if you will tell me what this is all about."

"I'll tell you," Bill said, from the living room entrance. "I heard it from the front door." He looked pale and his eyes met Molly's pleadingly. "It's very simple when you know. When my father died, I discovered he had been borrowing from the estate he was handling for Astrid. I begged her to let me repay her secretly and keep his good name intact, not only for my sake but for the protection of Dad's innocent partner and his family. Astrid agreed—"

"For a price!" Molly exclaimed.

"A lot of people are going to be very amused by this spool of wire," she told Astrid. "It will be a sensation at the club."

"Very funny!" Astrid said whitely. "Bill, take that spool away from her!"

"I don't think I ought to take it away from her, Astrid," he said. "You see, it belongs to Molly."

There was a tense silence. Astrid's eyes were full of fury and fear. At last she said, "What's your price, Molly?"

"Release Bill from your engagement," Molly said promptly. "And never, never breathe a word that will cast suspicion on his father. If you ever do, so help me, Astrid."

Astrid gave a long sigh. She turned her wheelchair around and started toward the door.

The moment they were alone she was in Bill's arms, her own clinging shamelessly around his neck, and he was murmuring lovely plans for the future.

"It's going to be hard, Molly, darling. There isn't much money left, except what I can get for the house, and it's a big debt I've got to pay. But when it's paid—"

"But, Bill, darling—" she began.

"No, Molly, you're too young."

"But, *darling*—"

"Not until you're eighteen," he said.

Molly laughed happily. Heaven was just around the corner!

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You Know Me!

I am a wonderful magician,
Turning my power on girls and boys,
And also a brilliant mathematician:
I halve your sorrows and double your joys.

I can make tears turn into laughter;
Change dull, wise men to happy fools.
Many live happily ever after
When they follow my simple rules.

I can burn you with thrilling rapture
Or chill your bones to the very marrow;
Easy to see, but hard to capture. . . .
I'm the lad with the bow and arrow!

—Celia Keegan

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Laurie on a Lark

Laurie and Duff had a little summer romance that he forgot—and she didn't.

By
RHODA
HALL

DUFF REAGAN sat with his feet up on the window sill and stared at the blank windows of the skyscraper across the street. Behind him, typewriters clattered and telephones shrilled. A rewrite man at the next desk was taking down a story over the telephone. The white-haired society editor was patiently listening while the seventeen-year-old office boy told her the changes he would make in the paper if he were managing editor. But all these sounds were only a background hum to Duff.

He was thinking about Laurie and trying not to feel guilty. She had followed him to New York, and he had sent her home again. A few summers ago when he'd been working on a small town newspaper, he'd stayed at her aunt's boarding

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house. He'd been a little in love with Laurie that summer.

There was something about her that made her different from any girl he'd ever met. Once you met her, you never forgot her. There was a hint of shyness in her large black eyes, and a bit of the flirt in the way her amazingly long lashes swept her cheeks. Her skin was as white and soft as a gardenia petal and her hair the blue-black of the midnight sky. She had long, slim legs and the tiniest waist imaginable. It would have been difficult not to fall in love with Laurie.

Later he'd realized it was only an infatuation. But she hadn't gotten over it. She'd shown up in New York one day, more in love with him than ever, and he'd had to tell her there was another girl. He had sent her back to Iowa, and he felt like a heel.

The telephone on his desk jangled. Duff swiveled his chair around and picked up the receiver.

"This is Albert Snowden's secretary," a woman said in his ear.

She paused to let the importance of that sink in, but Duff wasn't impressed. Albert Snowden, the much-married heir to the coffee millions, was Duff Reagan's pet hate.

"Mr. Snowden is inviting a few members of the press up to his hotel suite," she went on. "He has a story for you."

"What kind of a story?" Duff asked skeptically.

If Albert had eloped with another chorus girl, it wasn't news. It was monotony. Sometimes Duff suspected Albert of getting married just so he could get a little free publicity to boost the sales of Snowden coffee. Albert would have swallowed his grandmother's wedding ring if he thought it would sell an extra tin of coffee.

"Well," the secretary countered, "have you ever heard of the Island of Monrovia?"

"I was stationed there with the Marines during the war," Duff replied. "I also know that Snowden coffee is raised in Monrovia, if that's any comfort to you."

"Then you'll be interested in meeting our little native girl. She was born and raised in Monrovia. For generations, her family has worked on the Snowden plantation. She herself went to work in the fields at the age of seven. In fact, she never owned a pair of shoes until she came to this country at the age of seventeen."

"No glamour there," Duff murmured, and wondered what the angle was. Albert was interested only in glitter girls, native Islanders who wore a red hibiscus flower over one ear when they were engaged to be married.

"Her name is Marja Katranina," the secretary went on.

A BELL RANG somewhere in Duff's memory, but he didn't have time then to stop and wonder why the name seemed familiar to him.

"She came to this country to search for her sweetheart," the secretary was saying. "During the war he killed a Japanese general, so his people smuggled him off the island. In reprisal, the Japs burned the village to the ground, and the people fled to the hills. His letters never reached Marja, but she learned through the secret underground that he reached this country safely. As soon as the war ended, she came here to join her sweetheart, but she couldn't find him. All these years since the end of the war she has been wandering back and forth across the country, trying to find him."

Duff waited, puzzled. It all seemed so familiar to him, as if he'd heard it somewhere before.

"Yesterday Marja happened to be walking past our factory building and saw the name Snowden. Of course, she recognized the name at once. She was so homesick that she came in to pay Albert Snow-

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den a visit. She thought he might know where her sweetheart Pietre was." The secretary giggled. "Did you ever hear anything so quaint?"

"Pietre?" Duff echoed.

For a moment he couldn't seem to get his breath. He suddenly realized why this was all so familiar to him. Before he had finally settled down to newspaper work, Duff had tried his hand at everything from blowing a trumpet in a two-bit band to writing a novel.

It was during the war when he was with the Marines in Monrovia that he had written the novel, more to pass the time than anything else. It had been a story about the island and its people, but mostly about a young guerrilla leader named Pietre and his sweetheart Marja. There was a price on the boy's head because he had killed a high-ranking Japanese officer, so his people had smuggled him off the island. The book had ended with the lovers still trying to find each other long after the war was ended.

Duff sat perfectly still, little cold chills tickling his spine. It had only been fiction, and very bad fiction at that. How could a story he had made up out of thin air have come to life, even to the names of the characters? He felt the same way an artist would feel if a picture he had just painted suddenly winked at him.

"You know how kind and warm-hearted Mr. Snowden is," the secretary was saying. "Well, he's going to help the girl find her Pietre. He wants you newspapermen to write up the story and print pictures of her in the hopes that her sweetheart will see her picture and come to her. Of course, this will make Snowden coffee sales jump, but Albert Snowden isn't doing it for the publicity. He's only interested in bringing the lovers together." As an after thought, she added, "The girl sings too. Mr. Snowden has already had her auditioned and he is thinking of putting her on his radio show."

Duff hung up, feeling as if he'd just been for a ride on a runaway merry-go-round. If Albert was considering putting her on his radio show, it meant that he was in love with the girl. Everyone knew that Albert's newest heart interest was always given a spot on the half hour show, which explained why it was the worst show on the networks.

HE GRABBED his hat and rushed out the door. This could be the headline story of the year. Albert Snowden, heir to ten millions, in love with a simple little island girl who had never owned a pair of shoes until she was seventeen.

Out on the street, he shouldered his way through the crowds of late afternoon shoppers and made his way toward the lot where his coupe was parked. Duff Reagan was a tall, lanky young man of twenty-seven. He had broad shoulders that needed no padding. His wavy, gilt-brown hair caught the sunlight, and his thin face was firm and hard.

When he arrived at Albert Snowden's hotel suite, he found the place buzzing like a bee hive. Reporters and photographers were taking advantage of the cocktails and tiny sandwiches set out on a table for them. Albert knew how to put them in a good mood when he wanted a little free publicity. The secretary who had called Duff was there, circulating among the reporters and telling them about the little island girl. Albert was there too, his small black mustache twitching the way it did when he was nervous or excited.

Duff fixed himself a Scotch and soda and lounged comfortably against a door frame.

"Marja is a bit nervous, so be nice to her," Albert was saying.

"I suppose she speaks English?" one of the women reporters asked.

"Remarkably well. But occasionally she slips back into her native tongue." Albert smiled apologetically and added, "I've

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never been to Monrovia myself—too many insects to suit me—so I have to keep reminding her to speak English. Otherwise I couldn't understand her. I'm a pretty average guy. Like most people, I speak only one language."

He walked over to the closed door that was only a matter of inches from Duff, and rapped.

"Are you ready, my dear?" he called out.

The door opened and a sudden hush fell. It was as if an electric current had passed through the room. The reporters hadn't been prepared for anything like this.

She was as exotic as a tropical flower. She was wearing the native dress of the island women. Bare brown feet peeped from beneath the folds of a long rainbow-colored skirt. An off-the-shoulder white blouse gracefully revealed her smooth brown shoulders. There was a red hibiscus flower tucked over one small ear, and she was wearing gold hoop earrings. Her eyes were twin black pools, and there were blue highlights in her long black hair. She had sweeping black lashes and cherry-red lips. Her teeth were a dazzling white in her lovely mahogany face.

DUFF'S knees turned to rubber. It was Laurie!

"Ladies and gentlemen of the press," Albert said grandly, "may I present Miss Marja Katranina from the Island of Monrovia?"

Laurie's black lashes swept downward against her cheeks and she smiled shyly. She curtsied with queenly grace, one knee behind the other.

"*Wes dsa gainne*," she murmured shyly.

"Speak English, my dear," Albert reminded her. "These people don't understand Monrovian."

She tried to rise and couldn't. She had bowed too deeply. The slightest movement would send her sprawling on her face. Duff reached out and took her arm, helping her to rise.

"I understand Morovian," he whispered in her ear. "You said 'We meet again', and I'll bet it's the only thing you can say in Monrovian, Laurie Mathews of Prairie City, Iowa."

For a full second, she just stood there as if she were paralyzed. Then she turned slowly and her black eyes looked straight into Duff's mocking blue-gray ones. She swallowed, and her eyes grew enormous.

Albert took her other arm. "Come over here and sit down, my dear," he said. "And don't be nervous. You speak English better than I do."

Laurie kept looking back over her shoulder at Duff, her dark eyes pleading with him not to betray her. He put one foot up on the rung of a chair and to reassure her, took out a notebook and rested it on his knee, pretending to write.

But he was thinking of Laurie as she'd been that first day he laid eyes on her at her aunt's boarding house, back in Iowa. She'd looked up with unhappy black eyes that seemed even blacker because of the whiteness of her skin. It had been pouring rain, and he'd just waded the flooded street, suitcase in hand. Laurie had opened the door in answer to his knock.

"It's a good thing I have web feet," Duff had said; "or I'd never have been able to swim across the street."

But there was no answering smile in Laurie's eyes. Duff laid the back of his hand gently against her soft cheek.

"I'm going to teach you to laugh," he said softly.

And that he did. He taught her laughter and love.

Orphaned at five, Laurie had gone to live with a spinster aunt who loved money more than growing children. The year Laurie was seventeen, her aunt let the hired girl go, and Laurie did the work without pay.

It was summer. The moon was big and

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round, and as far as the eye could see, the wild daisies grew, carpeting the prairie with snowy enchantment. The evenings were warm and sweet-smelling. Even the trees rustled tenderly, and the air was aquiver with hushed expectancy.

EVENINGS they went walking together in the moonlight, and Duff held Laurie's small hand tightly in his big fist. Sometimes they talked excitedly, and other times they were afraid to speak for fear of breaking the spell of enchantment. They talked about their lives, and he told her about the novel he'd written and was carrying around in his suitcase. Some day he was going to throw it away, because it wasn't good enough to publish.

One night he glanced up at the starry heavens and saw a star shooting downward in a silvery trail.

"Look!" he cried. "A falling star."

Laurie turned her lovely face upward, and Duff forgot everything except those cherry-red lips. His arms went around her, and he kissed her uptilted lips. He kept on kissing her until she melted against him with a little sob.

"It's good luck to kiss on a falling star," he whispered in her ear.

She leaned back in his arms and looked up at him. The moonlight was shining full upon her long, blue-black hair. Her eyes looked very large and very black in the whiteness of her face, and the pointed shadows of her eyelashes seemed to reach halfway down her cheeks.

"I feel as if I've just awakened from a long sleep," she whispered. "I never really lived until I met you, Duff."

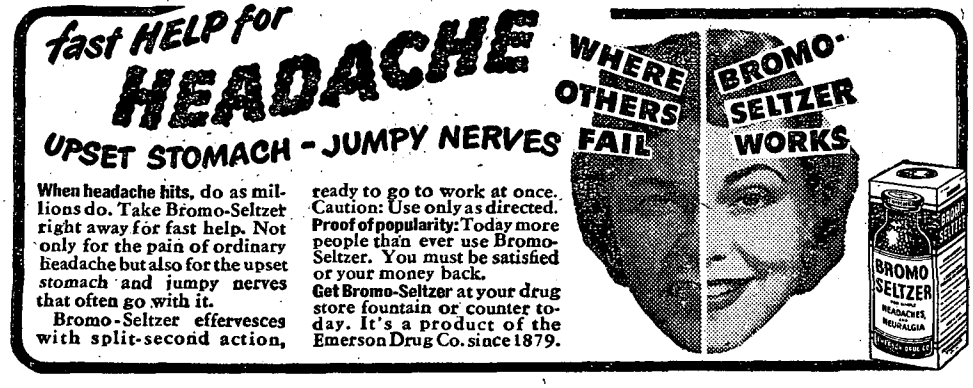
The magic of youth and love and tender summer evenings lasted all during the month of June. Then the end came with bewildering suddenness.

At the boarding house table Laurie had been serving Duff extra servings of meat and sometimes she managed to slip him a second piece of pie. When it came time to pay his bill, Laurie's aunt charged him twice as much as any of the other boarders because of the extra servings he'd had. And, of course, he didn't have the money to pay, so he had to move. Laurie's aunt kept his suitcase and all his belongings for security.

"You're welcome to the suitcase," Duff told her angrily. "You might try putting it in the soup to give it a little flavor."

Laurie was forbidden to see him again. Two days later he left town without getting a chance to say good-by to her. But he intended to send for her as soon as he was earning enough to support a wife. He wrote to her several times, but she never answered any of his letters.

For a long time he carried the torch. Then he met Evelyn Christopher. Maybe it was love on the rebound, but whatever the beginning, his love for Evelyn became a real and lasting thing. Evelyn was blue-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eyed and ash-blonde. She was a sophisticated career girl. In three years she had worked her way up from apprentice in the advertising office of Snowden Coffee to the position of executive in charge of all advertising. She had worked hard to get where she was. Two years ago she had spent her vacation in Monrovia, learning everything there was to know about the raising and roasting of coffee. She had even learned to speak the language fluently.

Duff had been proud of her until he had learned the reason for her ambition. Perhaps it was because he loved her so much that it took him so long to discover the truth. Whenever he asked her to marry him, she pleaded for more time and she wouldn't even let him buy an engagement ring. So Duff waited patiently for her to tire of her job and marry him. Evelyn was worth waiting for.

THEN one day Duff got a telephone call from Laurie. The shock of hearing her voice from a phone booth in New York left him strangely shaken.

"I brought your suitcase with me," she said.

"I doubt if the clothes will fit me any more." He chuckled. "My chest has expanded. But thanks anyway."

It was an awkward conversation. Laurie seemed embarrassed because she had called him. He realized that the thing for him to do was to offer to take her sight-seeing, but what fun would there be in that for either of them when he was in love with Evelyn?

"Well, I'll call you up some night," he said vaguely.

"Yes," she said quietly and hung up.

She didn't bother to tell him where he could get in touch with her, and he realized that she must have guessed that he was no longer interested in her. He knew that he had hurt her, and he pictured tears misting those big black eyes of hers. She was alone in this big city, and she had turned to him because he was the only friend she'd ever had. He had let her down. He couldn't understand why thoughts of Laurie should upset him so when he was in love with Evelyn.

Two weeks later the Snowden Coffee Company gave its annual banquet for its employees, and Evelyn asked Duff to go as her guest. Everyone was there, from Albert Snowden, who played at being president of the company, to the janitor and his family of ten.

Evelyn outshone the chandeliers in a strapless evening gown that glittered with rhinestones. Duff couldn't take his eyes off her. She took his breath away. And he had plenty of opportunity to sit and feast his eyes on her, because she sat at the executive table next to Albert Snowden. Duff was a little annoyed at that. If he'd known he was going to have to sit alone throughout the long banquet, he'd never have come.

Once, he became aware that a dark-haired waitress, who was clear across the room refilling glasses with ice water, was trying to catch his eye. There was something familiar about her, and he should have recognized Laurie, but his mind was too preoccupied with Evelyn.

Albert Snowden was giving a speech, and it was at the very moment when Laurie was trying to get his attention from across the room that Duff realized Evelyn was in love with Albert. The shock of his discovery left him ice cold, because he had never thought any girl could love Albert. Certainly not Evelyn. Suddenly Duff understood a lot of things. Like why she worked so hard at her job. As an executive she was thrown in Albert's company more often. Like why she kept putting Duff off when he asked her to marry him. She was hoping Albert would fall in love with her. Duff was too numb to feel anything.

Albert told some jokes he had stolen

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from a comedian who had told them over the air only the week before. Duff remembered that he and Evelyn had heard the program together on his car radio. It disgusted him a little to see her laugh almost hysterically at each stale joke, and she didn't seem to notice that she alone applauded.

Suddenly Albert grew serious. He smacked his fist in the open palm of his other hand and cried, "We've all got to work harder and sell more coffee. I want each and every one of you to help us think up new ways of advertising our product, and I am going to award prizes to anyone who can think up a slogan we can use. We've got to find new ways to make Snowden coffee the most talked about coffee on the market."

HE SAT down amidst thunderous applause. There were a couple of less important speakers, then they all scraped back their chairs and arose. Waiters stepped forward and began removing the tables to clear the floor for dancing. White-coated men with musical instruments began to take their places on the platform. Duff pressed forward through the crowd to claim his girl for the first dance.

"Oh, Duff, I'm so sorry, but I won't be able to spend the evening with you after all," Evelyn said. "Albert and I are going somewhere away from this mob to talk about a new idea I have for advertising." She couldn't hide the excited glow in her eyes.

He stood and watched her slip out a side door with Albert, then he turned on his heel and left by the front entrance. He wasn't sure whether the hot fire in his blood was jealousy or anger at the brush-off.

Just as he was about to step into his car, he heard his name called as someone came running toward him. He turned. It was Laurie, wearing flat-heeled shoes and a dark coat flung cape fashion over her white waitress' uniform. He stood looking down at her for a long moment. He'd forgotten how pretty she was.

"Come on. I'll take you home," he said.

"That was the idea," she answered.

When he had put her in the car and had climbed in beside her, he said, "You hung up the other day without telling me where I could call you."

"You didn't really want to know," she said quietly.

He couldn't lie to her, not when she was sitting there looking at him with those honest black eyes.

"I may as well tell you, Laurie. I'm practically engaged."

"I knew you'd found someone else." She turned her face away from him and looked out of the car window. "I saw you looking at her. You never took your eyes off her all evening. She's beautiful, isn't she?"

He didn't answer.

"Beside her, I must seem very drab and small townish," she said in a small, tight voice.

He changed the subject. "Why did you come to New York, Laurie?"

"I don't know exactly," she said evasively. "But I guess I'll try and get a job singing on Broadway."

Duff felt sorry for her. She was the last person in the world who could crash Broadway.

"I've been around to a few of the booking agencies," she added. "But I haven't found anything yet. While I'm waiting, I signed up with an employment agency. They got me this waitress' job tonight."

"It's almost impossible to get on Broadway," he said. "Most of the unknowns who do make the grade get there because they managed to think up a clever publicity stunt that landed them in the headlines. If you once get publicity, all the booking agencies in town will be after you to sign up."

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FOR A long time she was silent, as if her thoughts were off somewhere else. Then she asked abruptly, "Why didn't you ever write to me, Duff?"

"I did."

"Oh." Laurie's voice broke. "My aunt—she must have kept your letters from me."

It didn't matter now, Duff thought. He was in love with Evelyn. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Laurie brush her fingertips across her cheek, and he knew that she was crying to herself. A sudden tenderness for her that was as deep as pain twisted his heart. He wanted to stop the car and take her in his arms and hold her close to him. Instead, he clenched the steering wheel until his knuckles stood out white on his hands, and stared straight ahead at the road.

"How on earth did you find me?" he asked.

"Our newspaper back home reprinted a story that had your name signed to it," she answered in a choked voice. "I didn't stop to think. I just packed my things and came to see you."

He wished he could think of the right thing to say.

They had stopped in front of her rooming house. He took her small hand in his, and it was ice cold. He wanted to warm it with both of his big hands.

"Do me a favor, Laurie," he said. "Go home, marry some nice guy and be happy. Forget about me."

She looked up at him with a hurt expression in her dark eyes.

"Yes, that's what I should do," she answered softly.

Then she lifted her lips and kissed him gently on the mouth. Before he could put his arms around her, she was out of the car and running up the front steps.

But she hadn't gone back to Iowa. Here she was passing herself off as a native girl who was searching for a lost sweetheart. And getting by with it, too. She told the reporters so much about the hills and the long white beaches on the island that they could have written a magazine article about the place. Duff couldn't hide his smile of amusement. He recognized every word as coming from the book he'd written.

When at last the newsmen began to file out the door, she ran over to Duff and caught at his arm.

"I've got to see you alone," she cried. "I'll meet you at the little spaghetti restaurant around the corner in fifteen minutes."

He nodded agreement.

When she walked into the little restaurant fifteen minutes later, Duff's heart turned over with the excitement of her. She had changed into a white silk dress with a flared skirt that swirled gracefully about her long, slim legs with each step she took. A tiny apple-green jacket came just to her slim waist. Her shoulder bag and high-heeled pumps were white, trimmed with a piping of apple-green. There was nothing of the South Sea Islander about her now. She looked more like a sophisticated debutante with a sensational tan.

She sat down across from Duff, and their eyes met across the flickering flame of a candle stuck into the neck of a wine bottle. For long minutes, their eyes held, and the air about him seemed to come alive with whispering memories of summer evenings and a boy and girl in love. His heart was pounding.

Laurie gave her head a little toss. Her eyes held his unflinchingly.

"I took your advice," she said, "and forgot you. It was easy."

He winced. It hurt to be so easily forgotten.

"What are you up to, Laurie?" he asked.

She looked up at him through her long eyelashes and smiled. "It was you who put me up to it. You said that it would

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take a publicity stunt to get me on Broadway."

BRIEFLY, she explained to him how she'd gone home and had sat up half the night trying to think up a prize-winning slogan, thinking that would be one way to meet Albert Snowden and ask him to audition her for his radio show. To help her think up a better slogan, she'd gotten out Duff's novel, which she'd brought along in his suitcase, and had read it through again. He'd written so much about the island that she felt as if she'd actually lived there. Then an idea came to her that was so daring, it took her breath away. Why not pretend to be the girl in the book? All the newspapers would print the story about her search for a lost sweetheart, and her name would have news value.

"The rest was unbelievably simple," she said. "I rented a sun lamp and baked under it. Then I went to call on Albert. I thought it would be better to tell him my story, instead of going directly to the newspapers. They would believe Albert. But what amazed me was that he never for a minute doubted my story. I guess he was too busy thinking about coffee sales."

Or maybe he got lost in those big black eyes of yours and couldn't think of anything else, Duff thought grimly. Everyone knew that Albert had a weakness for beautiful girls with large black eyes. Or blue eyes. Or gray eyes. Or brown eyes. He wasn't too particular, just so she was beautiful.

"It worked like magic," Laurie said. "He hasn't told the press yet, because they might get the idea this was all just a publicity stunt and kill the story. But he's going to sign me as singer on his radio show."

"I suppose you know Albert goes with the job?" he asked.

She met his eyes challengingly. "That's all right with me. I could use ten million dollars."

A white hot anger boiled up inside of him. This wasn't the Laurie he had known.

"You've changed," he said bitterly. "You've gotten hard like all the get-rich-quick girls."

"Yes, I have," she answered, and tossed her head defiantly.

Her eyes fell before his and she fumbled in her purse for her cigarette case. She blinked her eyelashes, and he saw tears glittering on them. He leaned across the table to light her cigarette for her, and the nearness of her set his heart to pounding crazily. His eyes fastened on her cherry-red lips. He was so close to her that he could easily have leaned forward and kissed her. The thought of kissing her tingled through him.

HER cigarette was lighted, and he drew back, angered a little because she had such a hold on him. It was time he got her out of his system and forgot what had once been between them. The past was dead. Evelyn was his future.

"I think Albert likes me," Laurie said, studying the glowing tip of her cigarette. "When you get to know him, he's really nice. It isn't his fault that he's been divorced so often. If he could just find a girl who understands him, he'd get married and stay married."

Duff's jaw hardened. He remembered Evelyn telling him those same words. So Albert handed all the girls the same line, he thought grimly. If Evelyn could only know that, it might cure her of her infatuation for the playboy.

"Duff," Laurie was saying, "please don't spoil everything by printing the truth about me. This is my one big chance."

Even though it meant he could have scooped the other papers, he'd never intended to expose her. But suddenly he saw another angle to the whole thing.

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"I'll make a deal with you," he said. "I'll keep silent on condition that you help me get my girl back."

Her eyes flew to his. "Evelyn?" she asked. She seemed to have paled beneath her tan, but he decided it was only the way the candlelight was shining on her face.

"I want to marry her," he said, "but she has a crush on Albert. If I could just show him up as the no-good heel he is, I know she'd get over him in a hurry."

Laurie put out her cigarette with slow deliberation. "Where do I come in?" she asked quietly.

"Make Albert fall in love with you. If Evelyn could hear him handing you the same line he's been handing her, she might begin to appreciate my sterling qualities."

"And how do I do that?" Laurie asked dryly. "Just snap my fingers?"

His eyes rested on her lovely face. "It will be just that simple," he said. "No man could resist the witchery of those black eyes."

Her long lashes dropped downward against her cheeks. "You did," she answered.

He let that pass. "Albert would roll an egg uphill with his nose to sell an extra tin of coffee," he said. "So I'll call him up and tell him my paper wants to do a story about him showing the poor little native girl night life in the big city. I'll point out that this will make him look like a good joe in the eyes of the public. He'll go for it. Then I'll suggest that he make it a double date with Evelyn and I going along to make it look like the real thing."

"Yes," Laurie said.

"So turn on the charm for him, Laurie girl," he said. "If our little scheme works and Evelyn marries me, I'll give you a great big kiss."

She looked suddenly weary. "Thanks," she said in a flat voice. "But save the kiss for Evelyn. She might miss it. I'll settle for the ten million."

For no reason at all, he was suddenly angry. "Yeah," he said bitterly. "I guess you would."

LATER, when he called Albert, they arranged to go on a double date that same evening. They all met at the Torch Club, and there were five of them in the party. Duff had brought along a cameraman.

Evelyn looked sophisticated in black chiffon and a choker of pearls. Her short gold hair hugged her head like a cap and her skin was creamy white.

But Laurie stole the limelight. From the first moment when she entered the Torch Club on Albert's arm, every eye in the place remained on her. She was as conspicuous as a flame in a tangerine gown with a tight-fitting skirt that was slit to the knees on either side. She was wearing bright tangerine lipstick, and her tangerine slippers were no more than a criss-cross of ribbons and a pair of four-inch heels.

"She looks good enough to eat, doesn't she?" Albert said proudly.

Duff didn't answer. He was staring in amazement at the sudden flash of jealousy in Evelyn's eyes.

"You aren't at all what I expected," Evelyn said. "I thought you'd be barefooted."

Laurie smiled sweetly. "*Wes dsa gainne,*" she murmured with a shy flutter of her long eyelashes.

"Oh, have we met before?" Evelyn asked, surprised.

Laurie looked as if she'd stopped breathing. "Do you speak Monrovian?" she gasped.

"Of course."

Duff had completely forgotten that Evelyn spoke Monrovian, and now he regretted bringing the two girls together. He had to get Laurie alone and warn her

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to watch her step, or Evelyn would see through the masquerade. But he never had a chance to even get Laurie on the dance floor. She stayed as close to Albert as if she were chained to his wrist. She laughed at his corny jokes and fluttered her long lashes at him. Duff couldn't tell if she were just putting on an act or if she really thought Albert was as wonderful as she pretended. A hot, unreasoning jealousy shook him.

They went to three night-clubs in rapid succession, and in each one, Albert chucked the hat check girls under the chin. When he bought cigarettes he held onto the cigarette girl's hand as if he had no intention of ever letting go.

But in the fourth club, he ignored the hat check girl. He had eyes only for Laurie, and he kept looking at her tangerine lipstick as if he wanted to taste it. Laurie was making progress.

"Now if I were Pietre," he said, "I'd be moving mountains to find you."

"I'm sure he is," Laurie answered. "And one day we'll find each other again."

Albert looked disappointed, as if he were hoping she would never find Pietre.

"What do you miss most about your homeland?" he asked.

"The little red bananas," Laurie answered promptly. "The bananas you get in this country just don't taste right to me."

Duff held his breath and waited. He hadn't long to wait.

"But they don't have little red bananas in Monrovia," Evelyn said. "They are very big and very yellow."

"Oh, did I say they were red?" Laurie asked quietly. "I've had too much champagne. I can always tell when I've had too much to drink, because then I begin talking about red bananas."

Albert laughed. "I know just what you mean. Whenever I get too much to drink, I try to get everybody to drink tea."

They all laughed. All except Evelyn who was watching Laurie through narrow eyes. Duff began to feel nervous.

A FEW minutes later when they were all intent on watching the orchestra do a comedy number, Evelyn turned to Laurie and said in Monrovian, "This must be exciting to you. There's nothing like this in Monrovia, is there?"

Laurie was laughing at the antics of the orchestra. She didn't know that Evelyn was speaking to her, and she wouldn't have understood what she was saying if she had known. Evelyn sat back in her chair and turned toward the orchestra, a queer little smile on her lips. Duff's jaw set in a tight line. He knew that Evelyn had unmasked Laurie, and now she knew that Laurie had never been to Monrovia in her life.

During the next few days, letters and telegrams from all over the country began to pour into the newspaper office from

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men who claimed to be the long lost Pietre. Others didn't even pretend to be Pietre, but offered to marry the little native girl and make her forget her lost sweetheart.

Overnight, the girl from Monrovia had become the darling of the nation. The columnists wrote about her as if she were a visiting celebrity, and night after night, Duff read about her dates with Albert. They were seen everywhere together, and the columnists were wondering if she were forgetting Pietre. She made a guest appearance on the Snowden radio show and while her voice wasn't sensational, the audience loved her because she put so much bounce into her singing. Duff heard rumors that other sponsors were trying to get her before she signed with Albert.

Then one afternoon Laurie called him on the phone, and he was amazed to discover how much he had missed her.

"Duff," she said worriedly, "I just got home and found my room ransacked. Somebody searched through my bureau drawers."

"Did they take anything?"

"Nothing of importance. I don't have anything valuable." She sounded puzzled. "But my locket is gone."

"Your locket!"

"It's just a little inexpensive trinket that my aunt gave me when I graduated from high school. My initials are engraved on the outside, and inside are tiny pictures of me when I was seventeen."

"Nobody would bother to take that," he said. "You must have misplaced it."

"Maybe," she agreed doubtfully. "But, Duff, the manuscript of your novel is gone, too."

He tried not to let her guess at the alarm he felt. "Don't worry about it. It'll turn up again."

"Yes, I know it will," she answered. "That's what is worrying me. Where will it turn up?"

"Just don't worry about it," he said again.

"I can't help it. If Albert ever finds out the truth about me, he'll be furious. I don't think anybody could ever put anything over on him and hope to get away with it."

Duff was thinking the same thing, but he didn't want to worry her by telling her so. Instead, he said casually, "You and Albert are getting to be quite the twosome."

"Yes," she said. "I like him better every day."

Duff frowned. He'd wanted her to say the dates were just for publicity.

HE DIDN'T hear from her until a week later when she called him again. "Duff, I'm scared. Albert is giving a party for me tonight. He's rented a banquet room at one of the big hotels, and he's invited several photographers. He says there's a big surprise in store for me, but he won't tell me what it is. Duff, I think he's found Pietre."

"But there is no such person. Just say he's an impostor."

"It might not be that simple. Maybe there really was a guerrilla leader named Pietre."

"You still don't have to claim him as a sweetheart."

"No," she said. "But I'd feel better if you were there tonight."

"I'll be there," he answered, "if I have to play trumpet in the band."

He hung up and dialed Evelyn's office. "What's going on at that party tonight?" he asked.

"It's a secret," she answered coyly. "Even Albert doesn't know what it's all about."

"Oh, so you're the one who cooked up the surprise."

"You can't pry another word of information out of me, so you might just as well stop asking questions," she said. "You and everyone else will know all about it at midnight. Of course, you're

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invited to the party, but I won't be able to spend much time with you. I'm going to be busy all evening."

And that was all the information he could get out of her. He didn't like it at all.

Late that afternoon there was a five-alarm fire in a warehouse, and Duff was sent out to cover the story. The fire blazed stubbornly for hours, but at last it was out, and he phoned in his story. Then he went home to change and wash off the cinders and smoke. It was a few minutes before midnight when he arrived at the party.

An orchestra was playing, and several couples were dancing. Duff recognized a number of celebrities. Laurie detached herself from a group of admiring men and rushed over to him.

"I thought you weren't coming!" she cried.

She had been watching for him. Suddenly he felt as happy as a kid on a swing.

"Evelyn isn't here," she said. "She hasn't been here all evening. Even Albert doesn't know where she is."

"We'll let Albert do the worrying while we dance," he said, and guided her out onto the floor.

HE PUT his arm around her and was surprised to find her trembling. He folded her close to him, and she rested her head against his shoulder. Awed at the tenderness he felt for her, he found himself wishing he could hold her in his arms forever and never let anything hurt her. It seemed strange that he never felt this fierce desire to protect Evelyn. But then Evelyn wasn't sweet and gentle like Laurie.

There was a shriek of police sirens in the street outside. Someone must have looked out of the window, because word was passed around that Evelyn had just arrived with a police escort.

Laurie froze. Her face went white.

A few minutes later, Evelyn stepped up on the platform in front of the microphone. Duff had never seen her looking so happy. She motioned everyone to come closer. The orchestra stopped playing.

"Where is our little Marja?" she cried. "I want her to come to the microphone and say a few words of greeting to all of you."

The photographers began taking up positions in front of the platform.

Laurie looked as if she couldn't move. "This is it," she said under her breath.

"We can slip out the back way while there's still time," Duff whispered.

"No," Laurie said. "I can handle it, whatever it is."

With a proud toss of her head, she walked gallantly up to the microphone.

"I suppose you are all wondering where I've been all evening," Evelyn was saying. "Well, I was at the airport meeting someone special who just flew in from Monrovia. The plane was late." She turned to Laurie and held up a locket. "Do you recognize this, my dear?"

Duff felt sick. Now he knew who had broken into Laurie's room to take the locket and manuscript.

"Yes," Laurie answered in a quiet voice. "It's mine."

"I suppose you are wondering where I got it."

"I know where you got it," Laurie said steadily.

Evelyn smiled. "I got it by air mail from Monrovia along with a letter from a young man named Pietre who said you gave it to him to remember you by when he was smuggled off the island."

"I never gave my locket to anyone," Laurie said firmly.

It was so quiet in the room, Duff could hear his heart pounding. And there was nothing he could do to help Laurie now. He could only stand by helplessly and watch.

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"Now close your eyes," Evelyn said gayly, "and we'll bring in your surprise."

Laurie kept her eyes wide open. The huge double doors at the end of the room swung open dramatically, and a giant-sized man stood there. He had a thick black beard, and there was a row of medals pinned to the tunic of his homespun black suit. He walked toward Laurie.

"Who is this man?" she asked. "I never saw him before in my life."

"Don't you recognize your sweetheart, Pietre?" Evelyn asked.

A battery of flashbulbs went off. Pietre stepped up to Laurie, his arms outstretched. She took a step away from him. She looked very small and slim beside him. Her head was high, and her face was ashen. Duff's heart ached for her. She looked so brave and so all alone.

Pietre began to pour out a torrent of words to her in Monrovian. When he had finished speaking, there was a dead silence. Every eye was on Laurie. Duff could see her small chin trembling.

"Suppose you tell us what he said?" Evelyn asked.

Laurie just stood there as if she had turned to ice.

"Could it be that you don't speak the language?" Evelyn went on cruelly. She turned to Albert, who was standing a few feet away, his mustache twitching nervously. "This girl is a fraud, Albert. She's made a fool of you."

WITH A little sob, Laurie turned and ran from the room, the photographers following at her heels like hounds. Duff started toward Evelyn, his eyes flashing anger.

"You had no right to do this without consulting me!" Albert was shouting at Evelyn. "You told me this was just a little publicity party."

Evelyn looked shocked. "But I thought it my duty to—"

"I don't like people who go over my head," he stormed. "You're fired!"

Evelyn began to sob. "This is the thanks I get for the way I've slaved at my job." She turned to Duff. "Darling, take me home."

He smiled grimly. It was a long time since she had called him darling, and now he suddenly resented the possessive sound of it.

"You'd better take a cab," he cried, and ran from the room.

Out on the sidewalk, he found Laurie surrounded by photographers and a crowd of curious onlookers. She was crying and trying to get to a cab that was standing at the curb. Duff shouldered his way through the mob and put his arm around her slim waist.

A moment later they were both in the cab. He drew her head against his shoulder.

"I'm the laughing stock of the town," she cried.

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," he said. "After all this added publicity Albert will be more anxious than ever to sign you for his radio show. And I think you can have Albert, too, if you want him."

"Well, I don't," she sobbed. "I'm going back to Iowa where I belong. I only got into this mess because I was trying to be the kind of a girl you admired. You wanted a glitter girl like Evelyn, so I tried to glitter."

He laughed softly. "And I was always wishing Evelyn was more like you. I was never really in love with her, Laurie. Deep in my heart it was always you."

She was suddenly smiling through her tears, her cherry-red lips waiting for his kiss.

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Extravaganza

Carve me an igloo,
Pitch me a tent,
Lease me a penthouse,
Buy, build or rent

Some distant cabin
With a pine door,
Or find a palace
With shiny floor,

Cold in the northland,
Wild in the west,
Low in a valley,
High on a crest,—

Paint it vermilion,
Plant plum or pear. . . .
Just so I have you—
THAT'S ALL I CARE!

—Gladys Martin

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It took Zach's kisses to show Katie that Peter was an amateur.

Sunny Side of Heartbreak

By FRITZIE HAMMOND

KATIE SAT opposite Peter, conscientiously knitting a pair of argyle socks for him, her soft full lips pursed in concentration. But it wasn't for what Peter was saying. His earnest young voice was raised in enthusiasm. "I tell you, Katie, if more people read stuff like *The Meaning of Living,* we'd have a lot less scatterbrains and more mature, sensible, efficient adults who realize that life is a serious business that demands discipline."

"Mmm" Katie said intelligently. They had discussed this sort of thing often enough before, but tonight, somehow, she found herself bored by the whole business. She suddenly reflected that with Peter it was mostly words and she could do with some action.

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"Is there anything between you and Peter?" Zach asked suddenly.

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She laid down her knitting, and lifted her eyes to his. "Peter," she said gently, "Why don't you kiss me?"

His blue eyes widened. Then he grinned and strode across the room. Katie curved in the crook of his arm like a sleepy, comfortable kitten, and when his lips left hers, she giggled.

"What's so funny?" Peter demanded.

"I was just thinking about when I fell in love with you."

"I thought it just grew on us, like Topsy."

"Oh, I suppose it did, but I like to think it really happened when I was eight, that first day in dancing class. I thought I was the most miserable, awkward kid there until I saw you."

"It was pretty awful," Peter admitted. Her face sobered. "And it still is," she said ruefully.

He held her away from him. "Now look here, Katie. What's gotten into you anyway? We've both learned by now to accept ourselves the way we are. We're introverts, not social butterflies; we recognize there's more magic in Schopenhauer than Bebop. We're adult. That's why our love is so right. It's not just a glandular reaction or moonlight and cocktails. It's solid, built on a foundation that will endure."

She sighed. Sometimes he could sound so stuffy. But he wasn't really, she knew. She got up and walked over to the radio, flicking it on absently. A sweet, hot trumpet wafted into the room with a romantic quiver—soft, dreamy, suggestive. Hastily she turned it off, feeling somehow, traitorous. Then suddenly her mood switched. "Peter," she announced dramatically, "I want an engagement ring."

He dropped the sandwich he was holding, and stared.

She waved her hands. "All right, I know, engagement rings are a stupid, shallow gesture on the part of unimaginative, unintelligent egotists who want to flaunt their wealth and possessiveness," she recited. "We are above such petty gestures. But I want one."

He recovered himself to take another bite of the sandwich before he said, "This is just a mood, Katie. I understand."

His indulgence was just too much. "Will you stop eating my mother's sandwiches!" she screamed.

"Katie!" He was over beside her in a flash, holding her shaking shoulders, his eyes concerned. "What's wrong, dear? Are you ill?" he inquired softly. It was the tone, she thought, that one would use to a violent patient just before the straitjacket was slipped on.

"I—I don't know," she blubbered. "I'm so sick of scrimping and thinking twenty times before we take two baby steps. Maybe I need a new hat, a red one. Or maybe dinner at the Stork Club."

Peter led her over to the couch and sat her down. He smiled gently. "Here, this will cheer you up," he said, handing her a little blue bank book. "We've almost got enough for a down payment on that dream home of ours. Darling, you know that's why we have to go easy. Don't you think I'd rather be buying you crepes suzettes at a restaurant than raiding your parents' refrigerator?"

"I guess so," Katie said dubiously.

"Sure, baby," he placated, and she let out her breath in a deep sigh. She leaned against him and relaxed, safe and secure and comforted.

"I don't know what got into me," she confessed.

"That's what I said before," he reminded her.

"I know."

The room was silent for a few minutes and then he said, "All set now?"

She nodded, ashamed.

"Well, it's getting late."

Those were the usual parting words and again a tiny rebellion, unreasonable but stubborn flared up in Katie's breast. She

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beat it down again, almost immediately.

WHEN THE door had closed behind him, she concentrated on keeping her mind a blank as she picked up the dishes and ashtrays and carried them into the kitchen.

She was drying the last dish when she heard the front door open. Her father's voice boomed its way to her ears. "I tell you, Margaret, that woman's going to be the death of me. Client or no client, I'm going to tell her to go jump in the lake!"

Her mother's answer was soft, and soothing, but Katie couldn't catch it. She walked into the living room. "Hi, Dad," she greeted. "What has the cruel world done to you now?"

He glared at her. "None of your wisecracks, young lady. It was bad enough adjusting to the idea of having that walking encyclopedia as a potential son-in-law."

Katie bit her tongue to keep back the angry words in Peter's defense, but her mother was not that restrained. "Now, Sam, you just stop that kind of talk. Peter is a very nice, clean-cut young man and if he's good enough for Katie—"

"He's not good enough for her father!" he cut in ferociously and stalked out of the room.

Katie looked at her mother questioningly. Her father was usually mild mannered and this torrential outburst was most unlike him.

"Isn't he even going to have his cake and milk?" This was a ritual, never before slighted in Katie's memory.

Her mother spread her hands helplessly. "A blueberry and a cornflake would give him indigestion tonight. Hannah Cox got at him again." She chuckled merrily.

Katie sank to the couch and waited for her mother's mirth to subside. She wondered if she would be as pretty and young at her age. She couldn't see why not, since she had her mother's small, heart-shaped face, the creamy cameo skin, wide gray eyes and curly, coffee-colored hair. Even their figures were basically the same, softly rounded and petite. She had all her mother's gifts except the most important. Her mother was sweet and gracious and outgoing, and never, never self-conscious.

Her mother's melodious voice interrupted her thoughts. "Dad is actually fond of old Hannah, and she is, after all, his wealthiest, most influential client. But she's never stopped treating Dad like an incompetent, young whippersnapper ever since he inherited her from grandfather Adams. And tonight she really pulled a dilly."

Her mother's melodious voice went on as Katie slid to the end of the couch, crouched in a restless, expectant pose.

"Relax, Katie. Don't be so intense about everything."

She sat back dutifully as her mother went on. "It seems Hannah's niece and nephew are coming for a visit, the Randall kids. They're all she's got and no doubt they'll have all she's got some day. Anyway, she told your father in no uncertain terms that he was to supply the entertainment for them, and when he tried to explain that he was no longer one of the younger set, she was wild. She said if her guests were bored for one tiny moment, she would hold him personally responsible and find another lawyer!"

Katie frowned. She didn't think it was at all funny, such highhandedness. "Why doesn't he let her?"

"Honey," her mother said softly, "it's not only the money, though goodness knows I'm not beneath such things, but your dad would feel as if he'd failed a sacred trust. After all, your grandfather Adams was very fond of Hannah and if she hadn't been such an opinionated, aggressive female, she would have landed him. Of course, grandmother Adams was

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no slouch," she admitted admiringly, "and when she set her cap for him, Hannah was too proud to fight. So she kept her pride, her bad temper, and lived out a dreary, frustrated, spinster's existence." She looked at her daughter sharply. "It's not good to discipline your heart, and give your head too much control."

Katie flushed, kissed her mother and fled to her room.

THE NEXT morning at breakfast, something was definitely out of kilter. In the first place, her dad smiled and said she looked quite pretty. The most he ever did was peek from around the side of his paper to see if she used too much goo on her face. She never did. In fact, she suspected he wished she would look more hussy-ish and snag a new suitor.

Katie lifted her eyebrows at her mother but she smiled blankly in return.

Her father beamed and cleared his throat. "Katie, you don't have to bother coming down to the office today."

Katie put down her spoon carefully. She had been her father's secretary for two years, ever since business school graduation and Miss Cartright had left to get married. Her dad insisted he was still looking for a girl, and that Katie ought to work in an office with more opportunities, male, he meant, but she knew how much he depended on her. This had never happened before.

He patted her hand. "Why don't you go to a beauty parlor and have a wave or something."

"Why?" she demanded.

"Don't be suspicious. It isn't becoming in a young girl." He avoided her eyes, threw down his napkin and rose. "Your mother will explain," he said with dignity and walked out.

Her mother did. "Your father would be most pleased if you would consider taking the Randalls under your wing while they're here."

"Me!" Katie stared incredulously. "It's considered, and I won't do it."

Her father was back in the kitchen. "Oh yes, you will, or you're fired."

"I resign," she said indignantly. "This isn't part of my job, and Peter won't like it."

"Peter, bah!" her father snorted.

She did a surprising thing. She burst into tears. Dimly she saw her mother glare at her father's embarrassed face before he hurried out.

"How old are they?" Katie sobbed.

Her mother grinned. "Just the right age, darling," she said soothingly.

That night Katie went through her usual discomfort and stage fright getting dressed. She stood between her parents and smiled wistfully at Henry, the butler, as he admitted them. He gave her courage for they were old friends. He had sneaked her into the kitchen many times to sample some cookies.

From the living room she could hear music, laughter, bright chatter. Her mother patted her shoulder and whispered, "Buck up, old girl." It hurt because her mother was teasing her. Nobody understood. Nobody except Peter. She shuddered for a moment, then plunged in like a diver in icy water. The courtly figure of Hannah Cox descended on them. She leaned dramatically on her stick and Katie wondered if it were for support or effect. "About time!" she said loudly.

Dimly Katie heard introductions being made, but she was suddenly most preoccupied with the cut of her silver sandals. Then a masculine voice whispered in her ear, "If I said I was in love with you, would you argue about it?"

Her head jerked up and she stared into a pair of twinkling brown eyes, fanned with laughter wrinkles. There was a thatch of springy black hair, a flashing impudent smile and a dimple set on a six foot frame of aggressive dynamic mas-

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culinity. Her face froze. It was men like this who made her appreciate Peter. Here was the essence of all conceited glamour boys with air tight lines guaranteed to melt the female sex en masse.

She made her look one of studied indifference and summoned up boldness from somewhere. "Naturally," she said quietly. "I'm irresistible too." She emphasized the last word a little.

His gaze swept over her and she was glad her gown was more poised than she. It was a simple white waffle-weave pique laced up the sides in black velvet and slit enough to enable her to walk. It was her mother's choice.

She turned away from his frank gaze and shifted her eyes to a dark, attractive girl who was leaning against the mantle as if posed for a *Vogue* cover. She smiled at Katie and said, "I'm the other half. I'm Mitzie. Zach is older by sixty seconds," she explained seriously while her eyes laughed. "He never lets me forget it either."

Katie chuckled, but she didn't have time to answer for Hannah Cox took over with all the swagger of a conquering general, leading them all through a series of questions and answers that constituted her idea of a conversation.

MUCH TO Katie's surprise, the evening wasn't too awful. She was even a bit amused by Zach's adroit handling of his great-aunt. He used his charm on her profusely as he did on all of them, and Katie had to admit it was pretty potent stuff.

After dinner Mitzie exclaimed, "I'm bored. I don't think it's fair. Zach has a girl but I haven't got anybody."

Katie flushed while Hannah Cox's narrowed eyes flashed a signal to Katie's father.

It was Katie's mother who suggested sweetly, "Katie, it's early yet. Why don't you call that nice young man to come over. It'll be more fun to have four."

She was speechless. Her mother meant Peter. Her own mother asking her to hand over her heart interest to this bewitching tigress!

Then suddenly she smiled. Mitzie might be good for Peter! Maybe he'd appreciate Katie more, and learn about women, and even unbend and buy her something frivolous or something. The more she thought about it, the better she liked the idea.

Peter was in. After a hasty consultation while she held the phone, it was decided they would pick him up. Soon the four of them were seated around an intimate table, enveloped in blue-gray drifts of smoke, soft pinky lights and a sobbing blues number. Peter winced as he studied the menu and Katie knew it wasn't the suggestions but the prices that disturbed her hero. Peter made an excellent salary as a chemist. He was director of his own lab, but to watch him pinch pennies, one would think he was unemployed and not entitled to relief checks. She reminded herself sharply that he was doing it for them.

Mitzie ordered with an abandonment that took Katie's breath away and left Peter visibly shaken.

As Katie danced off with Zach, she giggled, watching Peter argue with Mitzie who refused to believe he couldn't dance. But Zach made it difficult to think of them. He danced as she might have expected, holding her too close, pressing his cheek against her hair with too much familiarity and doing steps like the male half of a professional dance team. He made her feel like the other half, too. And furthermore, he didn't try to carry on a conversation at the same time, all of which proved Katie's original assumption—he was a wolf, well-versed in all the wiles of woman-baiting.

She sighed. She might as well follow her mother's advice and not be so tense

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about everything. So she relaxed and gave herself up to the full enjoyment of the music and the dancing.

On the way back to the table, he said, grinning down at her, "Is there anything between you and Peter?"

She hesitated, then replied crossly, "We're very good friends." She didn't feel it necessary to explain her private affairs to him, and besides they were back at the table, spectators at a little tableau of Peter being pulled forcibly from his seat by a determined Mitzie. "I intend to teach this backward boy a thing or two," she said firmly. "He's going to ruin his eyes reading all those stuffy books." She smiled impishly. "I'm going to ruin his feet."

ZACH SALUTED his sister as she dragged Peter off like a predatory Amazon. Then Zach secured her eyes with his. "You're not in love with Peter, you know."

It was fortunate she was sitting or she would have fallen. She managed, "Dunninger, I presume."

"Nope," he said disarmingly. "Just an ordinary guy with an ordinary intelligence. But I know about you. A moron could see you've sold yourself a bill of goods."

"A moron? That explains your acumen."

It held him for a while. She lit a cigarette, surprised to find her fingers trembling. His eyes clung to hers through the fan of smoke. "I wouldn't count on knowing me," she told him. "You might be surprised."

He turned on one of his full-powered grins, the lopsided kind. "Maybe we'll all be surprised before this visit is over. It's going to be very interesting," he promised her wickedly.

Katie was grateful that Mitzie and Peter returned at that moment. She said she'd like to go home and Peter jumped eagerly at the suggestion, if not at the check.

Zach's challenging words needled Katie half the night. It was hard to believe he would pursue her, and it was a little flattering, too. But then, she told herself sharply, she was the opposite sex and Zach was the type who needed no more to go on than that. Exasperatedly she wondered why all the Zachs of the world had to be loaded with that extravagant coating of charm, looks and recklessness which made all the decent, dependable Peter seem a little dull, something like a small pilot light beside a roaring blast furnace.

At the office the next morning, her dad asked her if she had a good time. "Rotten," she said tartly.

He frowned. "The trouble with you, young lady, is you won't let yourself go. Some people grow up, but you've always been in such a hurry, you're growing old instead of up."

She opened her mouth to retort, but the phone pealed. "Judge Adam's office," she announced formally.

"Do you still think you're in love with Peter?" an unmistakable voice mocked.

"I'm afraid you have the wrong number," she said sweetly and hung up. But the phone kept ringing all morning. Zach was indefatigable. After the fifth call her father looked up and said, "Tell that wrong number that if he will stop calling, you will have lunch with him."

"I will not," she stormed.

"Oh yes, you will," her father said cheerfully. He answered the next call and assured Zach that his one and only daughter would be delighted to lunch with him and would he please let her get some work done until then.

Katie knew she was being taken unfair advantage of by both parties but she was getting tired of fighting.

Zach picked her up promptly at noon and took her to a fashionable restaurant

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where he had reserved a table. He bought a corsage for her despite her protests.

They were having their coffee when his blithe veneer cracked. He smiled but his eyes were slightly bewildered. "I don't understand you, Katie."

"Why?" she asked. "I'm really very simple."

"Don't you like me?"

He made it sound as if the idea were incredible. She was beginning to enjoy herself. "Not particularly. Do you know any reason why I should?"

He looked at her, frankly amazed. "Well," he said dubiously, "I'm charming, I'm good looking and rich. Old ladies, dogs and children, and most young ladies like me, so why not you?"

SHE SMILED slightly. "I haven't analyzed it but if you want me to I will." She studied him. "You're conceited, you're spoiled, and you're greedy like a little boy. You want what you want when you want it. You don't care about anyone but yourself. You, Zach Randall, are mostly brawn and undirected brain, and I prefer men who think about life sometimes, not just live it helter-skelter."

She smiled into his angry flushed face, picked up her purse, and walked out of the dining room, leaving him sitting there in an aura of injured indignation. She chuckled all the way to the office, congratulating herself on the artful, direct way she had rid herself of him.

Her spirits were high until about three o'clock in the afternoon when a messenger delivered a huge bouquet of red roses. In a generous sprawl the card read, "To the most honest girl I have ever met, who has made me see the light. You are going to make a new man out of me and you can start on this fascinating project this evening when we have dinner together. Awaiting my reformation breathlessly, I am always, as now, yours, Zach."

"But I don't want you," she wailed loudly, tearing the card to pieces.

She said nothing to her parents, knowing full well they would insist she keep the date, which she had had no intention of doing.

When they had left for the movies and she had curled up comfortably on the divan in an old cotton dirndle skirt and white peasant blouse, ankle socks and old white moccasins, the door bell rang.

She hoped it might be Peter, but when she opened the door her suspicions were confirmed. Zach Randall frowned down at her. "You're not dressed."

"I am, too," she said indignantly.

He grinned and walked past her. She closed the door and followed him into the room. Ruefully he looked at her and at the orchid corsage he was holding. Then shrugging his broad shoulders, he said, "I keep forgetting you're not like other girls. You wouldn't be impressed with orchids, would you?"

"No. I'm more concerned with the person than the gifts he bears."

Zach winced. "Gad, you're beating the devil out of my ego."

"You don't have to take the beating. I'm sure there are many young girls who would be willing to feed it a more agreeable diet."

"True, true," he agreed, waving his hand airily. "But I'm rugged. I can take it. This is a new experience and like all new experiences, rather interesting." He had recovered his self confidence. "The race is not yet run. How about tonight? What are we going to do?"

"I think Peter's coming over and—"

"Forget about Peter, for tonight anyway," he interrupted. "He's out with Mitzie, brushing up on the rhumba. Would you care to join them?"

He was watching her intently and his lips quirked mischievously. He had arranged this on purpose! "No," Katie stormed. "I don't care to join them and

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I don't care to go out with you. Good night!"

Very softly he drawled, "I'll tell Aunt Hannah."

"Oh," she gasped. "Blackmail!"

"Sticks and stones will break my bones but—"

"Okay," she cut in. "You win." What was the difference. If she didn't go out with him, he'd stay and plague her.

THEY DROVE to the beach and stopped at a little hot dog place that sported a juke box and a noisy young crowd. The rumpus and smoke depressed Katie but at least this place was in keeping with her outfit. If Zach looked a bit incongruous in his immaculate tux he never bothered to notice, although others did. Then some plaid-shirted young swain made a loud pointed remark about them and Katie wanted to slide under the table with embarrassment.

"Do you want me to punch him in the nose?" Zach asked casually as he bit into a hot dog.

"Are you serious?" she exclaimed.

He sat up straight. "Of course I'm serious. It's a little unfair. The kid would never stand a chance but if it will make you feel better I would be glad to oblige. After all, my first responsibility is to you."

The silly words coupled with the grave seriousness of his tone made her giggle.

He stood up. "Oh, you think I can't!"

"Oh, sit down, Zach," she said and laughed. "I believe you. I'd believe anything about you."

His eyes held hers. "Except that I might be in love with you?"

She flushed. "Don't be ridiculous," she said tartly. "You're not in love with me. Anyway, there's Peter. You forget Peter."

"No, you forget Peter," he suggested. "It would be better that way." He chewed on his hot dog thoughtfully, then said, "You and Peter don't add up, that's all."

"We do too. We're in love."

"Bah!" he snorted. "Neither one of you know the meaning of the word. You're two scared characters, afraid of emotions, bound together by fear, not love."

She picked up her coat and rose. "You can take me home now."

His eyes mocked hers. "I can but I won't. Sit down and finish your hot dog."

"I hate you!" she exclaimed passionately.

He nodded approvingly. "I'm glad to hear that. I'm glad to hear that you are capable of some violent emotions. It shows I was right. If you can hate me intensely, you might some day love me with the same intensity." He sat back in the booth and appraised her. Then he whistled. "Boy, wouldn't that be something!"

Oh, what a line! His eyes were devilish and she fought down the impulse to slap the pleased handsome face. This time she grabbed her coat and marched out, determined to walk home if she had to.

But Zach caught up with her and pulled her into the car. "You really should learn to control your temper. Poor Peter!"

"You leave Peter out of this. He's a perfect gentleman who never makes me lose my temper or anything," she finished lamely.

"Or anything is right," he repeated. "How long have you been dating that fugitive from test tubes?"

She gulped, "Two years."

"And how many times has he kissed you?"

"How dare you?" she demanded with as much dignity as she could muster.

"Never mind the dramatics. I want facts."

"It's none of your business!"

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His face grew grave. "That's where you're wrong. Anything about you is my business and when a guy dates a girl like you for two years and doesn't marry her or even buy her an engagement ring, the guy is either not serious or he's nuts. In either case, he doesn't deserve her."

He blotted out her hot retort by sweeping her close against him. His dark head was in a pool of shadow, but for the pale radiance of a street light glinting his eyes with flint. She knew he was going to kiss her even before the slow, deliberate lowering of his mouth, but she was powerless to stop him. He kissed her once; he kissed her twice, and then she lost count.

FOR THE first time in her life she understood what being in another world meant. There was such a world, beautiful, dizzy, washed with rosy clouds and rainbows and soft ethereal music, an exalted merry-go-round world. It was a visit she wanted to prolong. Peter's kisses had never been like this, she thought wondrously, clinging to Zach with fire in her fingertips. He released her and stood staring down at her. He said unsteadily, "Even I underestimated you, Katie."

Her face grew warm. She stammered, "I—I can't imagine what got into me tonight."

"You can't?" His voice was gently teasing. "Well, maybe I'd better explain. You are rather dense about some of the most obvious things in life. You see, my dear—"

"No," she screamed, "I don't want you to tell me anything. You're mixing me up. You're taking my nice comfortable world and turning it upside down. I don't love you. I love Peter. I want to love Peter. I want—" Her words ended in a wail as tears stormed down her face and her small fists beat against her skirt.

He started the car. "Okay, Katie." His voice was taut. "Have it your way. You're a stubborn girl and it'll take a better man than me to make you see the light." As the car slid across the highway, he continued in a monotone, "So I thought I was in love with you and you were the girl. But I can see it won't work. I'm an artist, not very temperamental, but you'd think so. Life has to be serious and sober to you. You're afraid of fun. You're afraid to laugh, to cry, to love. I don't want a woman who's afraid of life."

She didn't answer him, sitting frozen with shame and horror at the loosened emotions that were swirling inside of her. His words made a fearful echo in her heart. She closed the door tight on the chaos and told herself that after a good night's sleep, she would be normal again. This would be just like a bad dream.

When he stopped in front of her house, he started to say something, but in a flash she had the door opened and was running across the grass into her house, safe from him and the emotional tempest he created of her.

After a sleepless night, she rose with a headache and a black sense of doom, dreading the day.

Like a Spartan she dragged herself to work and as the morning passed without any incident relating to Zach, to her amazement, her depression increased. She congratulated herself on getting rid of the presumptuous Zach Randall and wondered dismally why her victory was so empty. Maybe because he had gotten in the last punch.

As she typed up the dry legal documents, a wistful smile touched her soft lips. He had been fun, in a way. She wiped the smile and the memories from her. His brand of nonsense was purposeless and dangerous. Besides, there was Peter. More than ever she was sure he was right for her. They were meant for each other.

Her logic did not waver as the week that followed found her without dates with Peter. The reasons were varied.

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Either she was too tired, or he was too busy. Then she heard some gossip about Zach. He was reputed to be painting the town in gory colors with a pretty new girl each night. Unaccountably, her heart sank. It was time to face things.

There was, yes there was, the possibility that she wasn't in love with Peter. And practical as Katie was, she could not face a loveless marriage. But she couldn't be sure she wasn't in love with him. She cursed Zach Randall for filling her mind with plaguing doubts, for casting confusion in her orderly path.

ONE EVENING as she was thumbing through a magazine without seeing it, fighting her private civil war, Peter called. His voice was low and urgent. He insisted on seeing her at once, alone. Her parents were out, so in a few minutes she found herself facing a restless, belligerent Peter. She hadn't refreshed her make-up because Peter never noticed things like that. He claimed a beautiful soul was more important than a beautiful face. Suddenly Katie wondered about Mitzie's soul.

When Peter refused the sandwiches she'd prepared, she was really worried. "What's wrong, Peter?" she inquired anxiously.

He turned to her, his body taut, his face set. "Katie, let's get married. Let's elope. Soon. Tonight!"

She caught her breath. This was not the man she knew. Her Peter was not given to impulse. She would have been flattered except that his face was grim as he threw the words at her.

"How come this sudden burst of ardor?"

"It isn't sudden. We've been going together long enough." His eyes pleaded as reasons tumbled from his lips, but now Katie wasn't listening to him. She heard her mind talking coldly, "He's right. Why wait?"

She looked at him. His strong sensitive face, his serious gray eyes gave her a sense of security. He was the kind of man a girl could trust with her future. He wouldn't make love to every attractive girl. She could depend on him to build a strong secure future. Maybe he wasn't glamorous or exciting or unpredictable, but she didn't want that.

She nodded. Oh, Peter darling, I'll make you a good wife. I'll appreciate you all the more for knowing Zach. Nothing will destroy the wonderful thing we have. I do love you. I do!

Aloud she said, "Yes, Peter. We can announce our engagement tomorrow night at the club."

She looked up at him with tear-filled eyes and he caught her to him, holding her tighter than he ever had, almost desperately. "I love you, Katie, I love you," he murmured over and over again.

Later that night when she lay wide-eyed in bed, she wondered what had made her quiet, reserved Peter so capricious and restless. Perhaps she didn't know Peter as well as she had thought. Perhaps there were unexplored facets to his personality. But she had the rest of her life now to become familiar with them. It should have been a happy reassuring thought but she fell asleep sobbing into her pillow and dreamt all night of a handsome rascal with black curly hair, with laughing brown eyes, instead of a serious, quiet man with blond hair and level gray eyes.

She told her parents the next day at breakfast. Her mother accepted it with a charming smile and launched into extravagant plans for a huge wedding while her father fidgeted. He opened his mouth to speak several times but a few direct glances from her mother quenched his desire for oratory. Finally in frustration and with stoic acceptance, he kissed his daughter, wished her well and announced he would give her a slam-bang wedding as soon as she wished. Katie burst into tears which

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frightened her father and confused her mother.

She didn't go to the office. Instead she shopped, went to the beauty parlor and attended a matinee that didn't make sense. She got home in time to dress.

The dance at the club was going in full swing when Peter and Katie arrived. There was the usual Saturday night crowd. Peter and Katie were greeted politely by several people, and finally eased over to a corner table. It was a table for four, and sitting there, Katie realized how few friends she and Peter had. She felt lonely and cut off, and for a moment she wished she had Mitzie's easy-going personality. It was the first time she'd admitted a desire to belong to the crowd.

Dancing with Peter, she complimented him on being such an apt pupil, but he wryly told her he had had a very enthusiastic and demanding teacher. She smiled. Poor Peter. It must have been rugged for him to be with that female ball of fire. Peter was strictly the fireplace and slippers type, like herself.

He brought her back to the table and with a determined expression announced that he was going to speak with Dana Seaman, the orchestra leader. She knew without asking that he would tell the orchestra leader to announce their engagement. She dreaded the announcement, and all the fuss that would follow and she wondered why Peter was suddenly foregoing his burning desire for privacy.

SHE WAS mulling this over in her mind when a penny spun across the table. She watched it whirl around wildly for a few seconds and then looked up into Zach's sardonic face. Mitzie was leaning nonchalantly against him. "Mind if we join you?" she asked, as she slipped into a chair next to Katie.

Katie was conscious of the vibrations of her body, a peculiar effect that Zach's presence always had.

He said gravely, "I suppose you know we're leaving tomorrow."

She stared down at the tablecloth, unable to meet the accusing eyes. But suddenly Mitzie's voice interrupted, "Speak for yourself, brother dear. I'm staying here to take care of some unfinished business."

"You're playing a losing game, doll." Zach told her sternly. "And you're out of your league."

This was a kind of double talk to Katie. She could find no clue in Zach's stubborn face, or in Mitzie's thoughtful eyes.

The next moment Peter was back at the table. He nodded a greeting to Zach and Mitzie and sat down beside Katie. "I couldn't get through to Dana," he murmured, squeezing Katie's hand.

She smiled reassuringly. "You'll try a little later. He won't make the announcement for an hour or so yet."

"What announcement?" Zach queried.

Peter put his arm around Katie. He answered determinedly, "We're announcing our engagement tonight."

"No! Peter, you can't!" Mitzie blurted. "You're not in love with Katie, you—" her voice broke off.

Zach's face was serious as he snapped, "Stop it, Mitzie, you knew about Peter and Katie."

Katie stared at Mitzie's pale face, the tears that shone in her shocked, disbelieving eyes. Then Katie's glance veered to Peter whose face mirrored his own misery.

She folded her hands on the table like a school girl and said very carefully, "I want to ask some questions and I want everyone to promise to tell the truth." She looked at Mitzie, "Are you in love with Peter?"

Mitzie nodded, wiping away her tears with her fist like a little girl.

Then Katie said, very low, "Peter, you're in love with Mitzie too."

Peter wet his lips and then started to blush. She felt sorry for him. She didn't

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dare look at Zach. "That's why you rushed over to the house last night and insisted upon announcing our engagement," she mused. "I thought it was kind of funny for you to get so enthusiastic after all these years." She leaned back in her chair and surveyed them. "It was lucky we waited or else it would have been a horrible mistake."

Peter gulped and said, "Katie, you've got it all wrong—"

She interrupted. "No, for the first time I think I've got it right. You're free, Peter." She smiled at him, fighting back the tears of humiliation and wounded pride. "I think you should announce your engagement tonight—to Mitzie. I wish you luck, Peter. I know you'll be very happy."

Her breath was ragged as she looked at his distressed face. She got to her feet and murmured, "Now if you'll excuse me, I feel a headache coming on."

She turned and rushed from the room, her only thought escape.

OUTSIDE, strong arms halted her flight and when she lifted her face, Zach's eyes were filled with compassion. For a second she stared at him and then broke into wild, uncontrollable sobs. He held her close, his hands caressing her hair, his voice quiet and soothing. "You're a great lady, Katherine, and I'll be proud to have you as the mother of my children if I can ever get you to say you'll marry me."

She tore out of his arms. "Is that the law of compensation! You'll marry me because your sister ran off with the affections of my fiancé?"

"Oh, cut it out," he growled, pulling her back into his arms and tilting her face up so that she had to look at him. "My sister never stole his affections from you because you never had them. You and Peter had a beautiful friendship and because you innocents didn't know any better, you called it love." He laughed. "It's lucky for you characters we Randalls came down and broke it up. What are you crying about, Katie? A wounded heart or wounded pride?"

"Stop it!" she cried. "It's a joke to you. Everything's a joke to you." But she knew he was right. She was not in love with Peter. It was good that she knew it—at last.

His eyes flashed and his jaw tensed. "A joke," he growled. "A joke to be head over heels in love with a stubborn ice maiden! No," he said quietly. "It's no joke." His hands bit harshly into her shoulders.

"Let me go," she wailed, more afraid of her own emotions than his anger, for the truth she had so long denied was now neon-bright in her mind. She was in love with Zach!

"Not yet," he murmured, and his lips found hers, hard, cruel, yet strangely tender. Unthinking, uncaring, she surrendered with every nerve of her slim, straining body to the magic of that other world, the world Zach alone created for her. She went limp against him, letting the strength and fire of him take possession of her and warm her long frozen, guarded heart.

Slowly, lingeringly, his lips left hers. A wry grin twisted his firm young mouth. "Did I say ice maiden?" he breathed. "Oh, Katie, marry me! I'll even settle for a station wagon, a house in the suburbs, a sensible job with the five-fifteen train and—"

She placed a finger over his lips and said shyly, "I'll marry you, Zach, but don't settle down, please. Stay just as you are because you make me come alive for the first time in my life, make me know love—"

Their eyes locked for a long breathless time and then they knew all their talk was silly and that action could say so much more. And better too.

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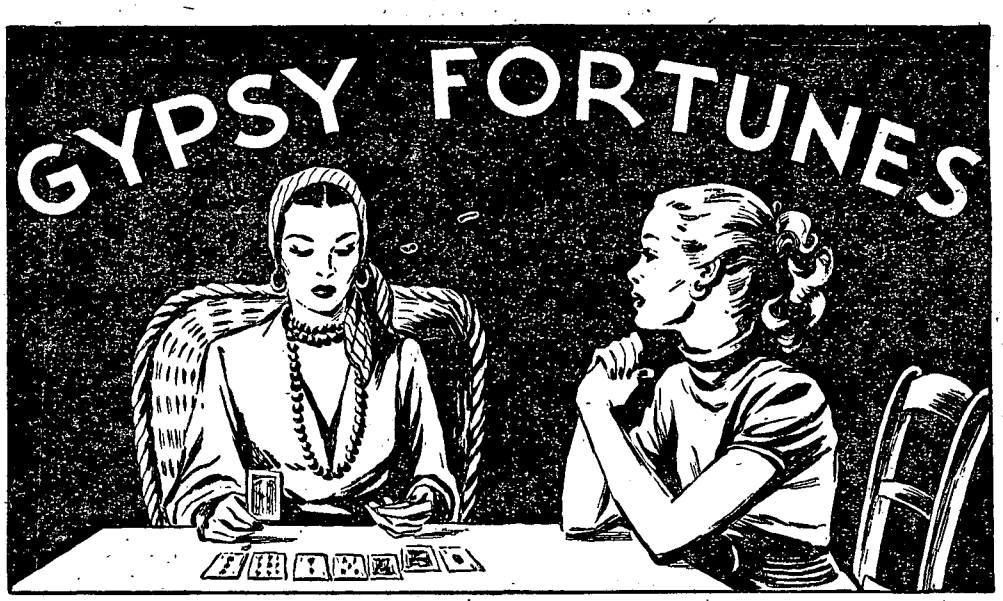
GYPSY FORTUNES



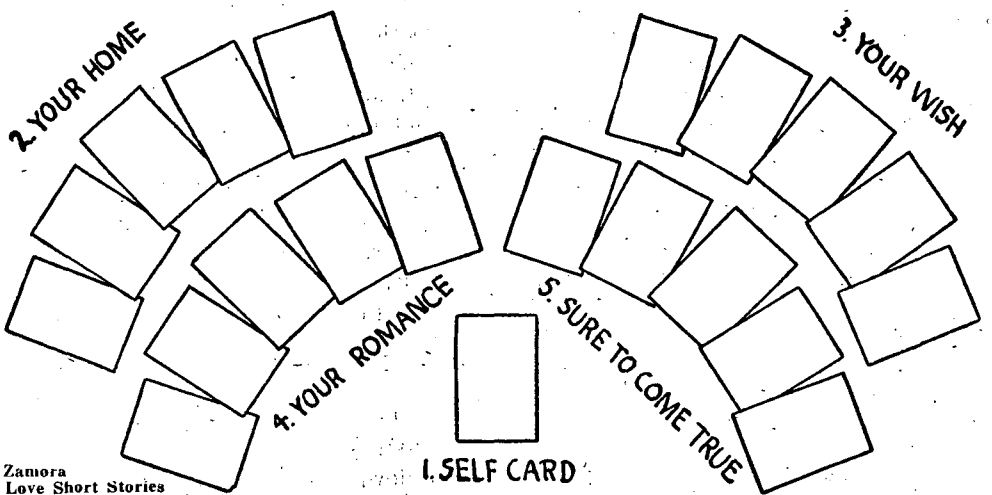
Cross Zamora's palm with silver—fifteen cents will do—and she will tell you a real gypsy fortune.

Select the card that represents you from a bridge deck: Queen of Diamonds if you are a very blonde woman; King if you are a man; Hearts if you are a medium blonde; Clubs if you are medium brunette, and Spades if you have black hair and black eyes. List that card in the space marked No. 1.

Now make a wish. Shuffle the full bridge deck with the self card withdrawn. Spread them in a horseshoe and select any twenty-one cards.

Lay them out in four piles of five cards each and you will have one card left. That is the surprise card.

Fill out the diagram and the coupon and send them with fifteen cents and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Zamora, and in a personal letter to you, she will tell you your fortune from the cards you have laid out.



Zamora
Love Short Stories
205 East 42nd Street, New York City
Dear Zamora:

Here is a list of the cards in my fortune. What do they mean? I enclose fifteen cents and a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reading.

NAME.....

STREET or BOX.....

CITY..... STATE.....

BIRTHDAY..... AGE.....

SINGLE..... MARRIED..... DIVORCED.....

8-50

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Love Me Later

By SHELBY STEGER

Marnie might be heroine material—but first she had to find a hero.

MARNIE ROBERTS, employed as a reader on the staff of *Lilting Love* magazine, sighed and raised starry blue eyes from Ruth Harlow's latest manuscript. Absurd to admit it, even to herself, but she was in love with a fictional man.

Not one man, actually, but a composite of Ruth Harlow's heroes. Sometimes they were tall, dark and a bit on the dreamy side, sometimes tall, blond and dashing, but invariably they were charming. The kind you'd adore to live happily ever after with.

The heroines of Ruth Harlow's earlier stories had varied—tall, blonde sophisticates, madcap redheads—but lately they seemed to follow a definite pattern. Marnie liked the pattern, possibly because it reminded her of herself. Big blue eyes, silkily lashed. Nose tilted just enough. Mouth rosily warm, made for kissing. Figure slim, gently rounded, the kind which wore clothes well. Yes, very much like Marnie, except—

Often Marnie pondered the irony of someone as quietly mousy as herself being a reader for a love story magazine. She should be someone like—well, like Ruth Harlow must be. A worldly, heart-wise girl who'd been in love often enough to know just what romance was all about.

Unfortunately, Marnie Roberts had always been too busy and too bashful for romance. Orphaned in her teens, she'd worked her way through a small midwest college, then left for New York, a career and, she'd hoped, love.

The career part had been fine. Starting as a typist with *Lilting Love,* within six months she'd been advanced to reader. In fact, it was she who had first brought Ruth Harlow's yarns to editorial attention.

As for love, all Marnie had done so far was read about it. She wished she knew Ruth Harlow, could talk to her. She'd bet Ruth would know how to bring romance to her uneventful life.

On a sudden impulse Marnie reached for pen and notepaper:

Dear Miss Harlow: Sensing your understanding, I somewhat hesitantly take you into my confidence. Despite my daily dealings in fictional love, I am so ridiculously shy that I lack personally the romance I yearn for. I wish you'd have dinner with me at some time convenient to you, and discuss the possibility of plotting a happy ending for me. Thank you

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"So who is it going to be?" Joe asked lazily. "You've had time to decide."

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ever so much. Sincerely, Marnie Roberts.

P.S. Your heroes—the blond and the dark one—are they real men? I'd adore to meet whichever one you haven't posted a 'Hands Off' sign on.

Marnie addressed an envelope in care of Ruth Harlow's agent, marked it "Personal, Please forward," then mailed it before she could change her mind.

The reply came two days later.

Dear Marnie: Dinner sounds like fun. So does plotting your future love story. Tomorrow evening, then? Yours, Ruth.

P.S. You're right, they're real. Would you like to take your choice?

MARNIE BUSTLED about with last-minute dinner touches. She'd be nervous, she thought, if she weren't so certain that Ruth Harlow was a wonderful, understanding girl. Generous, too. "Would you like to take your choice?" Imagine having so many men you could spare one or two for a stranger!

The door bell rang. Marnie made sure her gold jersey blouse was tucked smoothly within her trim black slacks, then opened the door and gasped.

A tall, wide-shouldered young man loomed before her. Crisp blond hair, twinkling blue eyes, a handsome, even-featured face illuminated with a dazzling smile. Ruth's blond hero, she thought in confusion.

"Hi, Marnie," he greeted her jauntily. "Here I am. Ruth Harlow, in the flesh."

Weakly Marnie clung to the door frame. That Ruth Harlow might be a pseudonym, that the stories might be written by a man, had never entered her mind. Oh, that dreadful, revealing note—how could she ever have written it!

"C-come in." Feebly she gestured toward a chair, stared in horror at her handsome guest, and wished she were dead.

"Actually, I'm Joe Gilbert," he informed her. "That note of yours was a challenge. No romance—sad! Here's a girl, I told myself, who needs old Doc Gilbert to prescribe for her."

"It's just that I don't know anyone in New York," she stammered defensively. "Back home there were dozens of men frantic about me." It was almost true; at twelve she had been very popular at dancing class; there had always been someone to carry her books home from school. If she hadn't had to work her way through college—

"I expected something grim in bifocals and health shoes." His blue eyes strayed admiringly from Marnie's small feet to the top of her brown curly head. "You're strictly heroine material, Marnie."

"Thank you." She blushed. "There are cocktail things on the buffet. Mix what you like, while I see to dinner."

"Okay. But a home-cooked meal is just the weapon to clinch things when you're closing in on your man. Even if I were the domestic type, this isn't the strategic time. Why, I haven't even kissed you yet!" Joe grinned. "Go change clothes. We'll dine amid soft lights and music. Scoot, now."

Marnie scooted. I haven't even kissed you yet—it was just the audacious sort of thing Ruth's—no, Joe's—blond hero might say. If the fictional hero thrilled her, no wonder the actual man did!

She removed her slacks and blouse, donned a lacy slip, fumbled through her closet. She decided the printed taffeta she'd never worn was giddy enough for this wonderful brash man to appreciate—a black background on which tiny multi-colored seals postured, each balancing a bright sequin on its silly nose. She opened the bottle of *Double Dare* she'd bought and never used, touched its sultriness to

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dash a little on her wrists and throat.

"Here's your drink," Joe Gilbert's deep voice called through the door.

She hesitated, then opened the door a crack, slid one bare arm through. Warm fingers grasped hers. "Mmmm, *Double Dare*, my favorite," Joe murmured and kissed her wrist. Before the glowing tingle could dart along her veins much further than her elbow, a glass was placed in her fingers. "Good for what ails you. Don't spill a drop."

She shut the door and stared at the pale, golden drink in her hands. She wasn't trembling much, she decided. Imagine dating the sort of man who recognized perfumes, who kissed your wrist! It seemed faintly dangerous and altogether exciting. Thrills and kisses, just what she'd wanted.

She drained the glass and felt confidence swoosh through her.

AS THEY dined, Joe chattered amusingly, impudently, mockingly about this, that and everything. If she hadn't known better, Marnie couldn't have believed this sophisticated man with the laughter-tilted mouth, the blue eyes where wicked humor glinted, could be the author of the tenderly delightful love stories she'd bought for *Lilting Love*.

His airy chatter inspired Marnie to mirthful reply, made her wonder what had become of her shyness. On the dance floor, when he held her close, she felt as if they were dancing up the lovely curve of a rainbow. This was fun, and she loved it!

She didn't even mind when he lectured her.

"Nothing wrong with you except you're too serious," he told her. "Men like gay girls, girls to have good times with. Marriage sneaks up on a man soon enough, to tie him down with bills and babies. Until he realizes he's hooked, a man wants laughter and kisses, Marnie. That's the bait to set your trap with."

It sounded like marvelous advice, Marnie thought gratefully; she'd not forget it.

Later, in a cab, Joe gave the driver a strange address. His apartment? she wondered in a panic. Love story heroes didn't do that sort of thing.

"I'm taking you to meet Ruth's other hero," he explained.

"I'd forgotten about him," she said candidly.

"Wrong technique, baby. Make me think you're madly anxious to meet the other guy," Joe chided. "Feminine wiles; acquire them. Not that you aren't terribly sweet without them, Marnie."

She raised her wide blue eyes to his. "Am I?" she asked breathlessly, really wanting to know.

For a reply, he kissed her. Long and with compelling skill, until her arms crept about his neck and she thought her heart must float away for very buoyancy. Oh, this was as heady as champagne; this was like dancing on tiptoe through swirls of orchids, like racing with a breeze!

"There! I did it and I'm glad." There was the whisper of laughter in his voice.

"I'm not exactly sorry." Marnie giggled and wondered at her new daring.

The cabby let them off at a small office building, where a night watchman took them up in the elevator. At the end of a dimly-lit corridor, light glowed behind a frosted glass door.

"Our fiction factory, Laird Finley's and mine. We live in the same hotel, we both write, so we decided to get an office to work in." Joe opened the door. "And here's Laird, grinding away. Laird Finley, Marnie Roberts. She's a reader, but as long as she accepts my stuff, we won't hold it against her."

This, Marnie recognized instantly, must be the tall, dark and dreamy hero. His short-cropped hair was touseled, he wore dark-framed spectacles, his cheekbones were high, his mouth bore a boyish diffi-

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dent smile. He looked—well, not at all bold, but attractive in a sort of absent-minded way.

"Hi, Marnie." Laird Finley rose and reached a lean, tanned hand across his typewriter. "This big wolf been giving you a whirl?"

"A lovely one." She walked around Laird's desk to stand beside him. "What are you working on?"

He yanked the paper from the machine, placed it face down on a stack of manuscript.

"Hate to be rude, but it's bad luck for me to show my unfinished stuff." He grinned amiably. "It's a novel. The great American one, of course."

"Of course." She laughed. "Joe, if you've anything I haven't seen, I'll take it home for a reading."

Joe shrugged. "I'm between yarns, fresh out of ideas. Come out and have coffee with us, Laird?"

Laird shook his dark head. "Thanks, but I want to finish this chapter while it's hot. 'Night, Marnie. Hope I'll see you again."

"I hope so." It was true, she mused; she liked Laird's looks. He wasn't exciting as Joe, but she'd like to know him better.

AT HER door, Marnie let Joe take her in his arms again. She wanted to be sure his kiss was as thrilling as it had seemed at first. It was. So thrilling, she was practically certain she was in love.

Marnie hoped Joe would call next day, just to say hello, but he didn't. The following day a script arrived via his agent. Good boy, he's been working, she thought approvingly. And how swiftly he worked up a story; he'd been fresh out of ideas, and here was a completed yarn. Like all the rest, it was good. Joe was wonderful!

That night she entered her apartment to a ringing phone.

"Laird Finley, Marnie. Short notice, but how about dinner?"

"Why I'd love to." She gave him her address.

Unable to visualize Laird Finley against a glitter background like Joe's, Marnie chose a demure gray wool which buttoned to her chin, a little cap of green suede which matched her low-heeled slippers. She hesitated over perfume, finally decided on her accustomed violet essence. No *Double Dare* for Laird, she suspected. No warm lips pressed to the quick pulse of a smooth wrist.

Laird's tweeds had been pressed and he looked very scrubbed and shining.

"Violets," he sniffed as Marnie let him in. "I don't see them."

"It's me. They come in bottles." She laughed. Only a very unsophisticated man thought girls still depended on sugar and spice, she reflected whimsically.

"Do you like Chinese food?" he asked as they rode down in the elevator. "I know a good place."

Hiding disappointment, she agreed. Chop suey, and those sickly-sweet tea-cakes with paper mottos in them—what a bore! Laird couldn't have been around much.

"It's not a fancy joint, but the food is authentic," Laird told her as a waiter approached their booth in the dingy little Chinese restaurant. "I'd better order for you."

There ensued a brief but animated conversation between Laird and the waiter in Chinese!

"You speak Chinese?" she asked, amazed.

"A few dialects," he said modestly. "Dad was a missionary. I was born in a village up the Yangtse, but I went to Shanghai for grammar school, then Honolulu for high school, and Berkeley for college. I served as interpreter in the China-Burma-India theater during the war."

"Oh," Marnie said. This was Laird, who hadn't been around!

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DINNER WAS strange and delicious. There was seawood soup, pickled fish, bean curd. A medley of vegetables, steamed, with bits of pink, tender pork slivered throughout. Their table was crowded with the array of dishes, and Marnie giggled as she tried to learn the Chinese names for the food which Laird tried to teach her. Dinner with Laird was anything but a bore!

Later they went riding through the Park in a hansome cab, something she had always longed to do. It was almost romantic, especially when Laird's arm tentatively rested on the seat above her shoulders, then dropped to hold her cozily closer. He was companionable to be with; feeling no need to impress him, she could be herself. It was very pleasant.

She felt her heart thud a little faster. She was, she feared, a fickle, unstable character. But she had a terrific urge to discover whether Laird Finley's kiss could be as thrilling as Joe Gilbert's.

He must have read her mind. At any rate, with a lean finger beneath her chin, he tilted her face to his, set his mouth on hers. It was a slow, gentle kiss, but it sent sweet fire through her, and she hated for it to end.

"Sweet Marnie," he murmured at last. "I should do this sort of thing more often, so I'd know whether—"

She waited. "Whether what?" she asked finally.

"Skip it." He smiled. "Joe's the expert on love, not I."

"Oh, love!" Remembering Joe's advice, she forced a shaky laugh. "Love's for later, when a girl's ready to settle down. Fun's for now. Fun, kisses, laughter. No love."

"Like that, hmmm?" Laird said. "Well, that philosophy has its points."

When Marnie went to bed that night she knew she was in love. This delightful, tremulous something which fluttered her breath, made her heart skip and stutter. It had to be love. Why it just must be!

But oh, golly, *who*? Was it Joe, who kissed with such thrilling skill? Or Laird, who lacked technique, but got results just the same? Being in love with two men didn't agree with any of the rules Marnie knew about, but it was nice. Even if confusing . . .

TIME SPED by, in no way solving Marnie's pleasant confusion. Evidently taking turns, Joe and Laird continued to date her.

Joe always called for her late-ish and whisked her off on a gay round of bright spots. It was odd, she thought, that his accutomed haunts included none of those classified as literary, where writers and editors kicked shop-talk and ideas around. Obviously Joe preferred the gaudier places with chorus girls, hot music, low comedy and high cover charges.

Marnie enjoyed meeting celebrities she'd heard of, or seen. If it was a woman, Joe would advise, "Study her. See how sure of herself she is, how she laughs at that guy she's with. Believe old Doc Gilbert, honey—that's the way to keep them coming back for more. Make them think you don't care."

When Joe introduced a new man, he whispered, "This lad's dish is fair, fast and funny. Make him laugh, Marnie."

It was wonderful of Joe to take such an interest in her. Of course, none of the new men interested her enough to let them know where she could be reached. But in case she ever decided to be one of those popular girls who had a different date every night, it was grand of Joe to teach her how it was done.

Laird continued to take her to small, out-of-the-way places which were fun. The friendly tavern, run by a lanky redhead he'd been in service with, where they drank beer, nibbled pretzels, danced to the juke box. The tiny movie house which ran old-time pictures, where they howled

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at ancient Chaplin comedies and Bill Hart westerns.

The Poppy Club, a mediocre night-club owned by Toby and Lou Burns, a couple from Laird's hometown out west. While Toby ran another club in Brooklyn, Lou, a striking brunette in her thirties, who always wore black and looked like a foreign spy from a B picture, sat at a table over a brandy, worrying about how bad business was. Marnie didn't care much for the Poppy Club, but she liked the glum Lou, and thought it was nice of Laird to spend a few dollars there for old time's sake.

It was all fun, and Marnie was tremendously happy. She liked both men so very much. It was delightful to have two admirers to make a girl feel desirable and attractive. But it really would be more delightful to have just one who loved her. One she loved utterly and completely.

Which? She wished she knew. When her heart didn't know, how could she expect her head to tell her? It would be much simpler if either Joe or Laird should turn out to be a villain. Every love story needed a villain. Two heroes added up to one too many.

One night, curled in the crook of his arm, Marnie sat on the sofa next to Joe, who had dropped in for a nightcap.

"So who is it, Marnie, the blond hero or the dark one?" he asked lazily. "You've had time to decide."

She could tell him the truth, she mused, that she didn't know. That when she was with him, she sparkled with a gay excitment, that life with him would surely be a wondrous thing of shimmer and dazzle. She could tell him that when she was with Laird it was relaxing, serene, like kicking off a lovely pair of spiked-heeled glass slippers and sliding into a friendly pair of old shoes.

Or she could use the startegy Joe himself had commended—keep them guessing.

"I think it's Laird," she said cautiously. "I think—"

Joe nodded his crisp blond head.

"Well, that's the way it goes." He scooped her into his arms, kissed her competently. " 'Bye, darling. All the luck." And he left.

SOMETHING HAD gone wrong, Marnie realized ruefully. Joe had been supposed to sweep her off her feet, convince her, very masterfully and romantically, that she was all wrong. That it was he, Joe, she loved and who loved her. Instead, he had merely disappeared from her life.

He left a big, aching emptiness in her heart, which frequent dates with Laird didn't quite fill. Laird was wonderful, but he wasn't dashing, debonair Joe. Joe was interested in her, wanted her to be happy. He had gone out of his way to teach her how to find a happy ending to her own personal love story. And then, because he was noble and wouldn't want to come between her and Laird, he'd stepped aside. Through her own foolishness, she'd lost him. She wished she knew what to do next!

"You're a novelist, Laird, you should know how people behave," Marnie said thoughtfully one evening as they strolled through the evening dusk. "If you'd lost a man and wanted him back, how would you go about it?"

"It's Joe, I suppoe," Laird said mildly. "How did you lose him?"

"I told him I loved you." She blushed. "I thought it would make him want me."

"But you don't love me." It was not a question.

"I'm terribly fond of you," she said, trying to be honest. "I admire you, I like you, I'm happy when I'm with you, but—"

"I'd say be yourself," Laird told her judiciously. "Take my problem, for instance. What if I were to pretend to be a gay blade, like Joe, just to try to fool the girl I'm in love with? It wouldn't work. I'm not that kind of person. I'd be foolish

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to try to be anything but the quiet, not very interesting guy I actually am. The kind who works and saves his dough so he can get married, instead of spending it on big evenings in places he can't afford. If I—"

"You're in love?" She felt an absurd sinking sensation around her heart. "I—I didn't know that."

"I've been in love for quite a while," he said. "But if my girl can't see me as I am, she'd never see me as a phony playboy. I'd do anything in the world for her, but I wouldn't try to change myself because I know it can't be done."

"I see." She sighed dismally. "Things can be pretty hopeless, can't they?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said calmly. "If I thought my girl were fundamentally the kind who could love a phony, she wouldn't be my girl. She'll wake up. Things work out. Just give them time."

"You—" She took a deep breath and started over. "You don't mean that Joe's a phony, do you?" And that I'm your girl, she added silently.

"Heck, no! Joe's a swell guy. Well-meaning, sincere—I like Joe fine."

"Me, too," she said in a tiny voice.

So there she was, she thought wretchedly, right back where she started. She'd lost Joe, she'd never had Laird—no villains, no heroes. What kind of a love story was this!

All she knew was that she was unhappier than she'd ever dreamed possible. It must be her own fault; she'd had every chance. Joe had told her exactly how it was done, but she'd muffed it.

ONE EVENING shortly after her talk with Laird, her phone rang. Maybe it would be Joe! Her heart gave a happy leap. And it was Joe!

"Laird's discovered a new singer at some little place, the Poppy Club, I think he said. He suggested I pick you up and we meet him there. Okay?"

"Oh, yes, Joe!"

Why the Poppy Club? she wondered; it was really a dump. But it didn't matter. Her heart sang as she bathed and dressed. Joe was back again! This time she'd be careful, she'd make no mistakes.

"I've missed you," she chattered brightly as they rode to the Poppy Club. "Did you miss me?"

"Oh, sure," Joe agreed absently. "Been busy with this and that. There's Laird."

"Hi," Laird greeted them. "Thought we might have a threesome for a change. Nice singer here. New. Sort of interesting."

The singer, Marnie thought, was nothing special. Pretty enough, with a low, throaty voice, like a thousand other torch singers. Laird had probably just wanted to bring her and Joe together again, and one place was as good as another for that. Oh, Laird was nice.

"Fascinating type over there," Laird murmured. "The woman in black."

Marnie followed his gaze to where Lou Burns sat with her usual brandy before her. Her gown was of black velvet, and she wore a tight choker of black pearls about her white throat. She looked world-weary, dramatic, sorrowful and mysterious.

"Attractive," Joe commented. "Mata Hari type. Wonder who she is."

"Lord knows. Someone struck by tragedy, no doubt." Laird turned to Marnie. "Shall we dance?"

"I don't think much of your singer," Marnie confessed as she circled the floor in Laird's arms. "And what's all this business about Lou Burns?"

"Just an idea I had," he said expressionlessly. "Look at Joe. He can't keep his eyes off the mysterious lady in black."

"He probably wishes he could help her," Marnie defended hotly. "Joe is wonderful about helping people."

"That he is," was all Laird had to say for the time being.

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WHEN THEY returned to their table, Joe's attention was still centered on Lou Burns' sad face.

"Brandy," he murmured. "She'll ruin her health, poor thing."

"Flotsam." Laird sighed deeply. "Flotsam and jetsam on life's stormy sea." Marnie ached to slap him.

The singer sang a couple more throbbing numbers and Marnie applauded dutifully.

"This isn't much fun," she commented. "Can't we go someplace gayer?"

Joe looked at her disapprovingly. "I'm studying that woman," he said. "She's a definite type."

"So am I," Marnie said crossly. "A bored type at present."

"You and Laird run along," Joe suggested. "I think I'll stick around. That woman needs help. I'll bet if she could talk things over with someone who understands—"

"Joe," Marnie said. "Joe, I wanted to talk to you myself, later. I need your advice, Joe."

He tore his gaze away from Lou Burns, smiled gently at Marnie.

"Why, honey, you're all set," he exclaimed. "I told you all the angles. Old Doc Gilbert's got you all fixed up. You don't need me any longer." He pushed his chair back, rose. "What that woman needs is a man to advise her. Someone to understand—" And he walked purposefully across the room, leaned forward to speak to the mysterious lady in black.

"Well!" Marnie gasped and turned to Laird. His brown eyes were bright with laughter as he tossed a ten dollar bill to the table.

"Let's get out of here," he said, "while Lou does what I asked her to do. She'll kid Joe along a while before she confesses that she's just the owner's wife, worrying about how to meet the payroll."

"How did you know it would work?" Marnie asked. She and Laird were having coffee in the back booth of a little all-night lunchroom a few blocks from the Poppy Club.

"I thought it was worth trying." He grinned. "I had to show you someway that Joe's interest in a woman ceases once he's given her the benefit of his priceless advice. Joe's a fine guy and I like him, but—"

"But he's so afraid some woman will catch him and marry him that he spends his time telling them how to catch other men." Marnie's blue eyes were bright. "Oh, Laird, you're so clever! Why, I might have gone on thinking I loved Joe for ages, when all the time—" She broke off, stirred her cooling coffee. "Your girl, Laird. She wouldn't be me, would she?"

"She would."

Marnie shook her head in wonderment. "You novelists! You know almost everything."

"Joe's the one who talks a good novel. He's got enough money that he doesn't have to actually write it." Laird laughed. "I'm the one who writes the love stories, darling. I'm the one whose agent pointed you out at lunch one day months ago, and so ever since, my heroines have had blue eyes, brown curls, and a mouth made for kisses."

She stared at him, her eyes misted with tears. "And you're bashful like me, so you let old Doc Gilbert take over. Oh, Laird, let's not wait for love! Let's get married right away. Love's for now, not later!"

His kiss held everything that a kiss should—excitement that blazed through her like wildfire, and the golden promise of all the tomorrows. Oh, darling Laird!

"Will that be all, folks?" the lunchroom attendant said and grinned all over his freckled face.

"Just a happy ending to a love story." Marnie laughed over Laird's broad shoulder. "And now we've found that, thanks—"

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Love—and Reason

Jane may say your flashing smile
Is what she finds so winning.
Doris, gazing in your eyes,
Says they send pulses spinning.
Claire may love you for your charm,
Warm and sweet as honey,
While Alice loves you for your looks—
And Jeannie for your money.

Joan may swear your thrilling voice
Leaves her slightly reeling;
Sue may say your disposition's
What she finds appealing.
Others can explain their love
By certain stodgy laws;
But oh, I love you so much more,
Loving you—
BECAUSE!

—Carol Hunt

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When a girl is lonely, her heart is apt to be reckless.

No Home for Her Heart

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By HOPE CAMPBELL

CLAUDIA Coburn sat alone in the small booth against the wall, making round wet rings on the table with her cocktail glass. One ring, round and empty. That was what going home would mean, home to that small town with all her friends engrossed in their children and houses and husbands. Not that she hadn't been popular enough and had enough dates. Somehow, Claudia had decided long ago, she just didn't inspire any man with dreams of her in his kitchen. A second ring. That was the lonely room which passed for an apartment here in New York. And the third ring. An absolute zero for romance in her life.

"She doesn't look as sensible as I was led to believe," Frances said insultingly.

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That man at the bar! Why did he keep staring at her? Claudia bit her lip and stiffened defensively. Even if she was sitting here alone, she was no pick-up.

Claudia turned her head away and saw herself reflected in the mirror on the wall. More than pretty, she thought impersonally, almost strikingly beautiful with her dark red hair and fair skin and brown eyes. All in tones of green as she was today, she looked more like a model than a secretary.

Her full mouth tightened a little. That still didn't change the fact that she was so lonely and hard up for a little fun and gaiety that she was sitting here, as she had done all too many late afternoons recently, waiting for her married boss to get away from the office across the street and have a cocktail with her before he went home. Only this afternoon, George was very late.

Perhaps a client had come in at the last minute and she shouldn't wait, Claudia thought, stirring uneasily. George had never stood her up and he wouldn't intentionally. But this was cheap and futile enough without waiting, she decided, rebellion welling up in her suddenly.

She turned abruptly, half starting to her feet, and then stopped. Because the dark, handsome young man had left the bar and was walking straight toward her.

He stopped beside her and smiled, a smile of quick and unexpected charm. "I've finally made up my mind. We've met before even if I don't know where or when."

His voice made the words sound like a love song, light and yet deeply thrilling. Claudia's long lashes fluttered and for a moment, she couldn't answer.

Then she said crisply, "I hardly think so. You've made a mistake."

"But I haven't," he insisted blandly. "Your name is Claudia Colton or Carlton. You work for an attorney. You're from a small town in Massachusetts. And you look lovely in green. Didn't you know?"

CLAUDIA'S brown eyes widened and she stared at him incredulously. He did sound as if he knew her and she did own one good cocktail frock which was black. But she didn't know anybody in New York to invite her to the sort of parties where she would meet dozens of people. And she was almost certain she had never seen this man before.

"May I?" he said and slipped casually into the seat across from her.

Claudia reached tentatively for her purse. "You may, but I'm sure we've never met."

He grinned at her. "We have," he insisted. "Don't you remember me? Terry Knowlton."

Knowlton? Somehow the name sounded a little familiar.

"Let's not bother comparing people and places," he begged. "I'm having a cocktail alone. You're having one alone. That's dull. For both of us. But cocktails for two are fun. And what are you doing about dinner?"

"I usually eat it," she said dryly.

He grimaced ruefully. "Don't be difficult. I couldn't be more respectable and less dangerous. I live in Westchester with my family. I've worked for the same advertising firm for five years. I'm single with no bad habits and even a few virtues. What more could you ask?"

Claudia hesitated, a smile on her lips. What more could she ask indeed? Terry was handsome and charming and apparently had a sense of humor. And she was lonely. Besides, he seemed sincerely convinced that they had met. And she had the oddest feeling of knowing and yet not knowing him.

Sudden recklessness flooded over her. She hadn't had a date in months and she was starved, not for food, but for fun. One evening could do no harm.

Then all at once, she remembered

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George and glanced around guiltily and just as abruptly realized she didn't want George to show up now. She didn't want to have to explain him. Then she relaxed. Almost six o'clock. George was safely on his way to Westchester by now. And Claudia felt only relief.

She looked at Terry and her heart began to pound, a little recklessly, a little heavily and giddily happy. One evening. One evening in months. And she was going to have fun.

They had another cocktail and dinner at an enchanting little Armenian place Claudia had never heard of and later they danced on a roof with all New York twinkling around them. She loved to dance and Terry was a perfect partner. Dance after dance, she stayed in his arms, eyes dreaming, face aglow, conscious of nothing but Terry's arms around her and his broad shoulder beneath her cheek and the music pounding a rhythm that echoed in her veins.

Terry didn't tell her much about himself. Nor did he pry and ask her questions. But they talked, endlessly and eagerly, and laughed more than they talked.

IN THE taxi, Claudia fell suddenly silent, glancing at Terry from beneath her long lashes. One evening, she had told herself recklessly. One evening out of months. But now, looking at that endearingly irregular profile, she knew one evening was not enough and her heart jolted. How many evenings would be enough? A dozen? A lifetime?

She gasped inwardly. This was madness and had been madness from the first. Actually she knew absolutely nothing about Terry.

At the apartment door, he took both her hands in his. "It's been a lovely evening," he said softly.

Then he just stood, looking down into her eyes for a long long minute. Her breath caught and her pulse began to race madly. Because his gray eyes were so revealing. Terry was going to kiss her, Claudia thought dizzily, and suddenly knew how much she wanted him to kiss her. Her heart in a tumult, she simply waited, her face radiant and her eyes starry-bright.

Then Terry's face changed, masked against her somehow. Lifting her hand, he kissed it lightly and murmured, "And you were the loveliest part of it all."

Then he was gone. Claudia stumbled into her apartment and simply stood there frozen and numbed, face dead white. Because he hadn't said he would see her again or even phone her. Terry had decided he didn't even want to kiss her. One evening, she had told herself. But obviously, he had meant this to be only one evening. And all the fun they had shared hadn't changed his mind.

Fool, Claudia told herself furiously, fool and idiot. Now she had to admit it. She had been lying to herself all evening. The name Knowlton did sound familiar but she had never seen him before and she was certain of it. Terry had wanted a date for the evening, probably any date, any pretty girl, and she had wanted a date with Terry almost from the first instant she saw him. So she had let him persuade her they had met. When both of them knew they hadn't!

She buried her suddenly burning face in her hands. Cheap, oh cheap, she lashed herself inwardly. The cocktail dates with George were bad enough. But when she sank to downright pick-ups! And then to fall— Oh, no, she wouldn't think about that, about that enchanted instant when she had thought Terry was going to kiss her. Or any part of the evening. All that was finished, wiped out, and now she could only pretend none of it had ever happened.

Only Claudia couldn't pretend that the sharp aching pain in her heart didn't exist. That was with her, sharper even than the

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way she despised herself for what she had done, when she went to bed and still there when she woke in the morning.

THE day was gray and so was her mood. In a coldly furious way, Claudia hated herself. She had glimpsed how far loneliness might drive her. And she knew she must stop it right now. If she concentrated on hating herself hard enough, she thought grimly, maybe in time that pain in her heart would pass.

She did her work at the office automatically, avoiding George as much as she could and, even while she was taking dictation, not looking at him.

But at the end of the day, she had to take the letters in to be signed. Then she stood there, looking down at him as he sat at his big shining desk and suddenly it was as if she were seeing him afresh for the first time.

That was George Bailing, attorney and her boss. She had worked for him for six months and flirted with him a little and sneaked out on surreptitious cocktail dates with him. And he was simply a tall, handsome blond man, with a line of chatter which was a little too smooth and suave, and she didn't really like him at all.

She liked tall, dark men with irregular profiles and—Claudia bit her lip. No. She mustn't let herself think of that.

George finished signing and looked up at her with smiling confident blue eyes. "I'm sorry about last night. My wife called just after you left and said we had unexpected guests. So I had to run for the five-seventeen and didn't even have time to phone a message to you."

A wave of self-contempt swept all through Claudia. George wasn't really worried. He thought she liked him too well to be angry even about being stood up.

She reached for the letters with one slender, steady hand. "I thought it must be something like that," she murmured.

"But we won't be having guests tonight," he suggested jovially.

Claudia kept her long lashes lowered so he couldn't glimpse the expression in her eyes, her self-contempt, her new contempt for him, a married man who liked to keep a small flirtation going on the side. And married to Alice Bailing too, who always seemed as sweet and pretty a wife as any man could want. Even in the cold businesslike atmosphere of the office when she came here, Alice couldn't hide the open adoration in her eyes when she looked at her husband. Claudia had noticed that and even on their cocktail dates, George had never gone so far as to complain about his wife.

"I'm sorry," Claudia said without expression, the story she had been planning all day ready on her tongue. "I'm not angry about last night. But I'm going to be awfully busy for the next few weeks. An old friend from home blew in last night and I have been elected to show him the town."

"An old friend?" George questioned jealously.

"Here to take a special training course at the head office of his company," Claudia said firmly and walked out.

SHE had a solitary dinner. She went home to her lonely apartment, so lonely that music from the radio seemed to echo in empty space. She switched it off and buried her face in her hands. She had been a fool and now she was paying for it. But she could have taken that—if only her heart would stop hurting so.

She could go to a movie. She could window-shop up and down Fifth Avenue.

She could do a hundred things but Claudia knew what would happen. She would go out, alone, and all around her would be other people, together, holding hands, having fun. And she would feel more lonely than ever.

Claudia closed her eyes, trying to shut

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out the vivid memory of that one evening when she had gone to a movie alone, but it was still there, mirrored against her closed lids. Waiting across from the Waldorf for a bus to take her home, she had seen a crowd of people emerge from the hotel, laughing people, snug in furs and glittering with jewels, waiting for a taxi. And George was among them.

Across the street, Claudia had shrunk back into the shadows but she couldn't force her eyes from the scene. George, with Alice clinging to his arm. Three other couples. And all around them, an aura of gayety and luxury and laughter.

All the things she had missed in New York and missed bitterly. The very next week, Claudia remembered now, she had started those cocktail dates with George in a sort of frantic desperate grasp for all the things she wanted so terribly and had never had, all the glitter New York promised but had never given her.

The phone rang and Claudia started, simply staring at it for an instant. It rang so seldom. Her hand was trembling as she picked it up.

"Hello," Terry's deep laughing voice said. "This is very last minute and I apologize but I did try to reach you earlier. Don't tell me you were having dinner."

"I'm afraid I was," she said breathlessly.

"Big dinner?"

"Tea shoppee special."

"Then there's no harm done," Terry decided. "I know those specials. They shouldn't interfere at all with dinner in Chinatown. Or am I wrong?"

"You're never wrong," she agreed.

THEN, after she hung up, Claudia was suddenly appalled by her own audacity. What had become of her good resolutions? Why hadn't she been able to be as cold and final as she had been with George? But, while she was talking to Terry, being cold and final had never entered her head. She couldn't have been.

She jumped up, laughing softly to herself. What did she care? She had a date with Terry, which was practically a rush, since they had met only last night. And lots of couples, famous and happy couples, had met unconventionally. Sometimes that worked out best. Meanwhile, she wasn't going to think one instant ahead all evening, not even if she knew she was going to hate herself after she got home.

Her black cocktail dress, Claudia thought, and dived for her closet. She dressed in a pulse-fluttering flurry and then all at once, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror and stopped, staring incredulously. What had happened to her? She hardly recognized this girl with the sparkling eyes and softly tremulous mouth, her whole body lightly poised with an air of strange new vibrancy. She had never looked like that before.

But then I've never been in love before, Claudia thought with an odd happy humility. Then she crushed the thought down. Tonight was tonight, and that was all. She wouldn't think beyond it.

Terry's gray eyes widened for an instant when he saw her and Claudia knew she had been right. She was different. Then she forgot everything, simply because she was with Terry.

They taxied to Greenwich Village for a cocktail. Not that Claudia needed it. Even before she touched hers, Claudia felt a little dizzy, a beautiful dizziness which was like champagne bubbles tingling all through her veins. Even her voice when she said the most ordinary things seemed to lilt in unison with the soft piano music, just because she was speaking to Terry.

Even after they went down to Chinatown, somehow neither of them felt hungry. They strolled up and down the crowded, teeming street, sniffing the strange odors and pressing their noses

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against the shop windows like children, peering at all the things inside. Terry bought Claudia a fragile porcelain bowl, transparent and incredibly light. He bought her a package of tea, a tiny ivory carving and a strand of exotically scented beads for her neck.

"That's enough," Claudia protested, juggling the parcels. "You can't buy out all Chinatown."

A fleeting, almost puzzled frown flitted across Terry's dark face. "Funny," he said in an odd voice, "I want to buy it out. I know now what women mean when they say they've been on a shopping spree. Tonight I can't seem to resist anything."

"And I don't think I can resist food any longer," Claudia laughed.

THEY went down into a basement on Pell Street, where one room led crookedly to another, and finally found a table in a side room where they could talk and yet watch everything. Then they ordered and ordered, more than they could eat.

Claudia hardly knew what she ate. But her heart raced crazily in response to Terry's every word, the barest touch of his hand. She pretended to look around but actually she saw nothing but Terry. As if, she thought breathlessly, they two were enclosed in a magic crystal ball through which they could see the world but the world couldn't touch the two of them.

Even as Claudia was conscious of it, the mood shattered as if the crystal had crashed on rocks. One instant, she and Terry had been laughing softly together, hands touching, and then suddenly he was sitting upright, a hard angry glint in his gray eyes, and Claudia felt as if she had run into a stone wall, a wall which separated them completely, cutting off that intangible electrical vibrancy which had tingled between them all evening.

Puzzled and shocked, Claudia looked around. Nothing had changed. Parties and couples were coming and going as they did all the time. A new party had just entered, three couples who looked as if they had dashed in for the evening from some suburb. That was all.

Then she looked at the party again, a baffled bewilderment nagging at her. Again, she had that odd feeling of knowing and yet not knowing which had struck her when she met Terry. She didn't know these people, not any of them. Still Claudia's eyes kept returning to a tall, gorgeously dressed blonde, beautiful but with an oddly sullen discontent to her full red mouth.

Almost, Claudia thought suddenly, as if both the blonde and Terry were people she had once known very well in a dream but had never seen or met waking.

She turned to Terry and her heart jolted. Because, incredible as it seemed, Terry looked angry and miserable and defiant all at once. What had happened to him?

"Terry," she cried impulsively. "What's wrong?"

He didn't look at her. "Wrong?"

"Something's wrong," Claudia claimed firmly and then her brown eyes clouded and darkened. Falteringly, she admitted, "I feel a little queer too. Do you see that beautiful blonde over there? I've got the same odd feeling about her that I have about you. That we've met and yet we haven't. By the way, Terry, can you remember now who introduced us?"

"Does it matter?" he demanded, his deep voice rough with irritation.

SHE stared at him. "Maybe it matters a lot," she realized slowly.

"Why?"

"I don't know," she said honestly. "I have the most wonderful fun with you, like nothing and nobody else I ever knew. Except there's something wrong and phony about the way we met. You knew about me but somehow I keep feeling it

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was a pick-up. That I never knew you."

"You're imagining things," he said, scowling. "And I've had enough of this place. Let's go."

Claudia's heart fell to earth with a crash. Something was wrong, terribly wrong. Terry's every word and gesture and expression screamed that. She froze, simply staring at him.

He flung down his napkin and started to jump to his feet. Even as he did so, the tall blonde rose and sauntered gracefully toward them. Terry straightened, his eyes blazing at her. And Claudia could only sit there, numbly waiting, her heart black with nameless premonition.

"Why, Terry," the blonde drawled with a mocking smile. "Fancy meeting you here. I don't believe I've met your friend."

"Frances Martin," he said. "Claudia Coburn. We were just about to go, Frances."

"So I see." Her voice tinkled ice. "Mission accomplished?"

"I'll see you tomorrow," Terry flung at her.

Claudia looked from one to the other, from the big diamond blazing on Frances' hand back to their faces, the faces of two people who knew each other very well and were thunderingly angry with one another. Just as their voices betrayed intimacy and shared knowledge.

Frances looked down at Claudia with an insultingly cold summing up. "She doesn't look as sensible as I was led to believe," she said, one eyebrow arching. "Or does it just not show?"

Claudia's chin went up dangerously. They were quarrelling and quarrelling over her in a way she didn't understand. But she refused to sit here and be discussed like some inanimate object.

"Won't you sit down?" Claudia invited crisply. "Obviously you have something to say, Miss Martin, and I think we'd all be more comfortable sitting."

FRANCES looked startled for a moment and then a small cruel smile played around her full mouth as she sank gracefully into a chair.

"I just wanted to know if Terry had saved the family honor," Frances said lightly, but there was a cutting edge to her voice beneath the lightness. "Of course, we all know George is a fool about women but— Do sit down, Terry, darling. And please stop scowling. After all, if you haven't accomplished anything, it's up to someone to do it."

"Mind your own business, Frances," he warned, his hands clinging white-knuckled to the back of his chair as he stood there, towering over them both. "Go back to your own table."

Languidly, Frances flourished the flashing ring. "It will all be in the family after next month," she said blandly and that small cruel smile deepened around her lips as she turned to Claudia. "I wonder if Terry mentioned that he and I are to be married soon."

Claudia blinked and the numbness which had held her silent, as if this were some shocking scene in which she had no part, broke abruptly. All at once, she was icy cold, her body, her mind, her heart.

Her tone matched chill for chill. "There was no reason why he should."

"Oh?" Frances questioned smoothly. "I didn't know. I was against this whole idea from the start. If George is making a fool of himself over you, I still think it was Alice's place to speak to you. Since you're the type who must be spoken to about dating your boss."

Claudia could feel her face going dead-white, every bit of blood draining out of it. Just as her heart was suddenly dead, stony-still, with no life or feeling left in it.

Frances went on a little petulantly, twisting the ring on her finger, "I don't know why Terry had to be brought into it. Let the wife handle it was what I said from the first, instead of getting her

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brother to tidy up her little messes for her. But Terry always has been too soft about Alice."

CLAUDIA didn't let herself close her eyes, didn't let herself refuse to face this. She held herself there at the table by sheer will power while every nerve in her body screamed for her to run, for her not to listen to this, to try to pretend it wasn't happening, had never happened.

Because, in a sudden flash of recollection, she knew. She had seen Terry before. And Frances too. That evening when she had stood in the shadows, watching George and his party leave the Waldorf. Terry and Frances had been one of the gay glittering couples with George. And that was why the name Knowlton had rung so familiar too. More than once, she had typed Alice Knowlton Bailing on legal papers which related to George's own business affairs.

"Frances, that's enough," Terry said, his deep voice shaken by anger. "Go back to your own table. I'll discuss this with you later, but meanwhile remember that Claudia isn't like George's other secretaries, all the ones Alice made him fire. And it's because Alice knew she was different that it's been handled this way."

"Different?" Frances murmured insolently. "So different you have to take her out two nights in a row to get anywhere?"

Terry went white-lipped with anger. For a moment, Claudia thought he was going to strike the other girl.

But he only turned his back on her and said, "Are you ready to leave, Claudia?"

She stumbled to her feet and knew she was saying something and only hoped it didn't sound as stunned and dazed as she felt. Somehow she knew they were getting out of the place, but she was moving in such a tense nightmare that she was hardly aware of what she did.

Then, once they were outside, with a fresh breeze sweeping her face, she suddenly jolted back into reality, reality as harsh as the bright lights of Pell Street flashing in her eyes.

She didn't hold out her hand. She simply stood there stiffly and looked straight up into Terry's gray eyes.

"Thanks for the defense, even if it was a little feeble," she said, quite steadily. "And everything else too. It hasn't been fun but at least, I've learned my lesson. You can tell Alice Bailing I'll start looking for another job tomorrow."

"Please, Claudia," Terry said quickly. "You don't understand and I don't blame you. I've handled this badly and Frances really finished the job. That isn't the idea at all."

"It's my only idea," Claudia said coldly.

He shook his dark head impatiently. "Please listen. George will play the fool with every secretary he gets. Time and again. But Alice likes you and could see you were different. Oh, damn, I'm putting this so badly but the idea was to persuade you to stick on the job but keep George in line. You're the kind who could do it. And Alice would have more peace of mind than she's had in years."

Claudia's eyes flashed mingled heartbreak and humiliation and anger. "Tell Alice it's her job to keep her own husband in line," she cried bitterly and felt her heart catch with relief as she saw a taxi drawing up to the curb to discharge passengers. "I'll find something less complicated."

The taxi was empty now. She turned and jumped in it and slammed the door against Terry.

"Hurry," she cried. "I'm in a hurry."

THE taxi started with a jolt that shot Claudia back in the seat. She caught one final glimpse of Terry standing by the curb and that was all. Fists clenching, she sat stiffly upright. She mustn't move. She mustn't think. She mustn't let herself feel. She must get home. Then, alone,

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she could face it. She would have to.

When she stepped inside her door, Claudia didn't quite know what to expect of herself. She was bitter and heartbroken and hated herself and the world and yet she was too angry to be completely crushed. Why hadn't Alice talked to her, simply as one woman to another? If Alice had felt she couldn't do it and must use Terry, why hadn't Terry handled it honestly and straightforwardly, like a decent, honest human being, instead of playing games with her?

Rage bubbled up in her. She had been a little cheap but not as cheap as Terry. Terry had played the lowest trick a man could. He had diverted her interest from George all right. But how! With a word here and a gesture there, deliberately making her fall in love with him. Oh, she loved Terry and hated him too. And she would never see him again. Never.

She raised her bright head, her face white and bleak and drained of all emotion. It was over. Her poor foolish dream of love was finished. Never, she thought, would she dream again. Now she would accept it, the loneliness, the unwantedness, the dreary round from some office back here, day after day, year after year. Some women were never meant to love and be loved, and she was one of them. And she wanted no more palliatives; dates with the boss, pick-ups, the little palliatives to keep hopes and dreams alive. She was through.

Claudia jumped to her feet, heart pounding suddenly. Those were footsteps outside her door and a key was turning in her lock. She froze, eyes dilating, as the door swung open and Terry stepped inside.

"Terry," she gasped.

He nodded to someone outside in the hall. "Thanks, pal," he said. "I can take it from here." He closed the door behind him, explaining with a wry grin, "I got your superintendent to let me in. Ten dollars did it. I was afraid you wouldn't let me inside the door—if I knocked."

"I don't know why I should," she cried stormily. "Or why you bothered coming here. You've done your job. George is safe from me and your sister can relax, even if I do refuse to watchdog her husband. That's her headache."

"Right," Terry said cordially. "From now on, strictly her headache. Though she's going to be delighted in one way.

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25c ALL-STORY LOVE

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Alice always disliked Frances heartily."

Claudia stared. "She shows good taste but I don't know what it has to do with me."

"Did you think," he asked with sudden biting scorn, "I, or any other man, would put up with a scene such as Frances pulled off at the restaurant? Alice tried to tell me months ago—"

Claudia closed her eyes for an instant. "I'm sorry, Terry," she said. "But I'm really not interested in any more of your family squabbles."

"This was no squabble," he growled. "This was the climax of a lot of little similar things. The climax that made me realize if I ever did love Frances when we got engaged, I can't remember now what it was like. I saw that tonight and it finished me."

"FINISHED you?" From somewhere deep within Claudia, all the hurt and rebuff and pain changed finally into anger, raging anger against Terry. "I don't see what you have to say to anybody about anything they do, considering the way you treated me. You couldn't be decent and honest. You couldn't just meet me, tell me the whole truth about what you wanted and put it up to me as one decent person to another. Oh, no. You had to be crooked and devious about it. You had to take me out and deceive me and let me fall for you."

"Do you think I did it deliberately?" he asked softly.

"I know you did it deliberately," Claudia said stonily. "Believe me, I know. I was there."

"So was I," Terry said quietly. "And I was all ready to do exactly what you say I should have. It was all arranged for Alice to see that George didn't turn up and then I was to take over and just have a quiet talk with you. But you threw a monkey wrench in the works by being so beautiful and sweet and lovable. After a few seconds of talking to you, I didn't want to talk about another man. I didn't want to talk sensibly and reach a sensible conclusion. I only wanted to take you out and have everything perfectly wonderful between us."

"I hope you enjoyed it," Claudia said bitterly.

Now, looking at Terry, listening to the deep tones of his voice, all at once her heart was pounding again, the blood was bubbling like champagne in her veins again. Fool, Claudia tried to tell herself, silly stupid fool. Wouldn't she ever learn?

Still something in Terry's gray eyes, a warmth, a searching and yearning tenderness was telling Claudia she was not a fool. Not a fool, but a woman in love and loved.

"Oh, Claudia," he said, his voice shaken, "I can't tell you what happened. I only know it happened. I only know that from the minute I saw you and spoke to you, nothing and nobody mattered except the two of us. Sure, I tried to make you fall in love with me. Why shouldn't I? When I knew I was falling deeper in love with you every minute?"

In one stride, he was close to her, catching her in his arms, tight against his shoulder as if he could never let her go. Claudia gasped once and then Terry was kissing her, kissing her wonderfully and wildly and crazily. Then she realized she was kissing him back just as madly, clinging to him and returning kiss for kiss. As if they were the only two people in the world.

"Sweetheart," he whispered against her lips. "Maybe you think we started off all wrong. But for me, everything is right as long as you're there. And will be forever."

Forever, Claudia thought, her heart catching and almost seeming to burst with happiness. All her life, all Terry's life, all their lives together and they would be together always.

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By MAURINE GEE

Just a Dream Away

Debbie wanted a career—of loving Rocky.

WHEN the chow bell clangs on Linton campus, like a fire engine gone wild, there's a scramble for the malt shop across the street where pie is rich and juicy and the ice cream extra fine.

Cutting across the grass, a jump ahead of the pack of summer students, came Debbie Arnel, nineteen. She always dashed in at the back entrance of the malt shop, plunked down her books, shrugged into a uniform and called in breathless triumph to Mrs. Mapes, the manager, "I made it!"

Today Mrs. Mapes motioned to her from behind the long counter. "Debbie, do you think you could take over the sandwich board?" she asked. "Joe hasn't shown up."

"Oh, no!"

"You can try," Mrs. Mapes said firmly. "I've told the girls no orders for three-deckers or hamburgers."

"Where's Rocky?" Debbie asked.

Rocky Rhodes was the owner of the shop, her one and only reason for this quick change at noon each day.

"At the stadium shop or the new drive-in," Mrs. Mapes said. "Watch your fingers with those knives; they're awfully sharp."

Linton's hungry horde stood three deep at the counter yammering for attention. The two soda girls stood at their stations eying Debbie impatiently.

"One Swiss on rye, one deviled egg on wheat toast," came the first orders.

Debbie felt trapped as she moved over to the sandwich board. Thank heaven she knew where things were—she always made a sandwich for herself when the noon rush was over. Everything was there before her: the bowls of lettuce, mayonnaise, relish, the egg mixture, the tuna, the slices of ham and cheese and the knives in a neat row.

She got to work, concentrating on the orders, trying to do things Joe's way. She passed the sandwiches along at a slow, steady rate, but gradually, as the orders piled up, her wrists felt weak.

"Ah, here's the boss," someone at the counter said. "Now we get some service."

"I'll take over." A big hand closed on Debbie's arm and pushed her aside. "Where's Joe?"

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SHE looked up into the lean face of Rocky Rhodes. When things went wrong a vinegar-edged anger soured his soul. It showed in the thin, automatic smile he gave her. I'm going to lose him, she thought. The feeling rushed over her with overwhelming certainty. He doesn't want me here—any girl would do.

"Joe didn't show up," she said.

Rocky tied on an apron and took her place. She moved over to help Mrs. Mapes with the booth service. She had thought she was unhappy at the sandwich board but this being ignored brought on a new set of worries.

When the crowd thinned out, and it was time for her next class, she expected Rocky to take a moment off to speak to her. She had not seen him last week-end, because he'd been busy working on the new San Tomas drive-in. Now she loitered as she took off her uniform and picked up her books, sure that he would come out to the shipping room to speak to her. But when she glanced out in front she saw that he was at the telephone in earnest conversation, and Mrs. Mapes stood at his elbow with a list in her hand, waiting to claim him the minute he had finished. Nothing but business—business from early morning until late at night.

Debbie's lips tightened. She had an impulse to march in there and say to the intent young man, Come and walk in the sunshine with me. I'll ditch class and business will keep. But she merely left her notebook on the bench, a convenient excuse if she decided to return later. Hurriedly she went out the back door and headed for Norden Hall and a spot of psychology.

In class Debbie sat eying Professor Ervin with flattering attention, but the meaning of his words escaped her. She saw herself in the gym at the Square Dance Jamboree. Rocky was in her square, though he was not her partner. The music was lively and the bull-throated caller was on his toes. Each time Rocky went by, erect and handsome, he seemed to have a special way with her.

"Swing that lady across the hall
You ain't swung her since 'way last fall."

In one breathless moment Rocky smiled at her and said, "Having fun?" Debbie wrinkled her nose saucily and drawled, "Ain't had so much since 'way last fall." Rocky threw back his head and shouted that big, booming laugh and the others stared at him. The next time he whirled her he said, "How about tomorrow night?" "You might call me," Debbie said. And that was the beginning.

GOLLY, was Professor Ervin going to talk forever? Debbie glanced down at her wrist watch and gave the stem a gentle twist. Hidden deliciously on the back of the watch was the inscription, To Debbie from Rocky. The night he gave it to her they were parked in his ancient car in front of her house. She had just finished her first Saturday night working at the malt shop and she was so tired that she sat with her head resting against the back of the seat.

"Well, what do you think of the Rocky Rhodes?" he asked.

"The man or the shop?"

"The shop."

"Wonderful," Debbie said. "Mrs. Mapes' pies are super and certainly you make the best ice cream in town."

"I ought to," Rocky said. "Cost me plenty to get the knowhow. At first I tried a big batch like mother used to make but mine turned—well, it tasted like frosted sand. Now everything's going fine. The stadium shop shows a nice profit and I have a keen idea for a drive-in over San Tomas way—when I find the place and the money."

"You trying to sell me a Rocky Rhodes?"

"Yeah, Rocky the man," he said. "Wor-

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ries me the way Ned Brittner hangs around you."

"Ned's a wonderful friend."

"Yeah, he's a nice guy. That's why I have to speak up. Look, Debbie, I'm running on a four-year plan. Soon as I get my shops running, soon as I get my debts paid off and a decent place to live, I'm going to ask—someone to marry me."

"Four years!"

"Two years are behind me, only two to go. Maybe I could cut some corners, maybe it won't take that long."

Debbie tried to laugh. "We hear all this silly drivel about courting and all—" She broke off. His face was in shadow and yet to her he seemed so handsome. There was almost a quaver in her voice as she asked, "Whatever gave you the idea I'd be interested?"

"The way you look at me," said Rocky. "The way you smile."

He gave an odd, half-mocking laugh. Gently he drew her into the circle of his arms. His lips were warm against her cheek and Debbie had a queer breathless feeling as though she were out of breath.

"I want everything nice and easy for you, Debbie."

"But I'll never see you," she wailed. "You work so late at the stadium shop and now you're talking about opening a drive-in. I'll never see you. We'll never have fun."

"Have your fun, Debbie, date all you like. Just remember I come first. Remember you're my girl."

FOR a long comforting moment he held her close, then he kissed her good night and they walked up to her own front door. They could see her grandmother sitting in the living room but he would not go in to speak to her.

"This is just between the two of us," he said.

He had a plan and a chart for everything and that was the way it had to be. He acted as though they had signed a contract or something and he was glad to get it off his mind, glad to concentrate on business once more.

After Debbie left Professor Ervin's class, she worked on an English paper in the library until after four o'clock. When she cut across the campus, there, waiting patiently in his new green coupe, Ned Brittner sat waiting for her. He worked in his father's bank and usually got away by four o'clock, in time to drive her home. He got out of the car and went around to open the door, smiling at her with undisguised approval.

"Hope you're not in a hurry," Debbie said. "I have to stop at the malt shop to pick up my notebook."

"For you," Ned said, "I would stop at City Hall."

He drove the half block to the malt shop. The entrance opened on the corner, the back entrance on the side street. Ned parked at the side of the building and Debbie said she wouldn't be a minute.

Mrs. Mapes was busy at the cash register and Joe was back of the soda fountain featuring two patches of adhesive tape on his pink round face.

"What happened to you?" Debbie asked.

"Everything happens to me," said Joe. "Geez, I just bump this guy kind of hard on account of I'm in a hurry and he gets out of his car and tries to beat me to death. You should have seen me, blood all over. That other guy doesn't look so good either."

"You just missed Rocky," Mrs. Mapes called to Debbie. "He found your notebook. Said he'd leave it by your house."

"By my house?" Debbie said quickly. "When?"

"He didn't say."

As Debbie hurried across the sidewalk to Ned's car, she heard a whistle from the back entrance of the shop and Rocky came toward her, the notebook in his hand.

"Wait a minute, Deb, here's something

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belongs to you. Meant to bring it by." He was smiling straight into her eyes as he handed over the notebook. "I would have been late, though, good and late."

"Mrs. Mapes said you had gone."

"That's what she thought." He shook his head at the futility of trying to run on schedule and grinned at Ned. "Hi, Bittner. Nice of you to chauffeur my girl around."

"Thank you," Ned said dryly. "I appreciate your permission to date Debbie."

"In moderation, of course," Rocky said. "No serious passes."

He opened the door for Debbie and she got in beside Ned. With all her energy she willed Rocky to speak up and say he would stop to see her the minute he closed the stadium shop at nine. She hadn't seen him for a week and yet here he was letting her drive off with Ned, not the least bit worried.

SHE smiled encouragingly at him as Ned turned on the ignition. "You mean you're coming by later?" she asked.

"There's a business deal brewing tonight," he said. "I'll come by later, if I can make it. I'll call you."

His hand closed on her arm for a moment with a reassuring pressure before Ned drove off.

"What you see in that roughneck I'll never know," said Ned.

Debbie laughed, her confidence restored. Naturaly Rocky didn't want to seem too eager in front of Ned. She felt sure that he would telephone her the minute she got home.

"Gammy would agree with you," she said. Debbie lived with her grandmother who had been a mother to her ever since she could remember. "Gammy says he's just a Great Dane who thinks he's a lap dog."

"Burns me up when I think of you working for him," Ned said.

"Only at noon and Saturdays," Debbie said. "I work for Mrs. Mapes, really. I never see him. He's always at the stadium shop or over in San Tomas, building that new drive-in."

"You know what's going to happen to him, don't you?"

"Why, sure, he's going to have Rocky Rhodes shops all over the country."

"He's going broke," Ned said flatly. "He's spreading himself too thin. He never has more than a few dollars in the bank, it goes out the minute it comes in. This San Tomas deal is going to finish him off."

"I talked against the San Tomas deal, too," Debbie admitted. "We got into an argument and now he won't discuss the slightest part of it with me."

"He doesn't bank with us, of course, but the word gets around. That lot he's building on in San Tomas belongs to Annalee Durand and she's not giving anything away. She worked too hard getting that first million from the old duck she was married to. When Annalee and the contractors get through with Rocky, his creditors will walk in and take over."

"He's doing his own contracting."

"So what? Materials and labor aren't for free, you know."

Debbie was so dispirited by the time Ned stopped in front of Gammy's little white house, that she just sat there for a moment.

"They're showing the tennis matches tonight over television," said Ned. "Come on over to the house and we'll watch them."

He had asked her to go to the matches with him two weeks ago, but thinking of Rocky, she had refused. Now she shook her head. Ned was nice and all that, but Rocky had said that he would call her and even though he had mentioned a business deal, still he would surely telephone and make a date for later on.

"I shouldn't stay up late Friday night," she said. "Saturday is my working day."

"Aw, come on, Debbie. I'll bring you home any time you say—early or late."

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She hated to hurt him. How strange it was that the wrong person was always so eager, so responsive. She was sure of Ned, yet her heart closed against him. Why was it her heart closed against Ned and yet opened so fully to Rocky who kept her dangling miserably from one meeting to the next? She had known Ned all these years and yet she had no words of comfort for him. She could treasure his happiness and sense his despairs—but let him keep his distance. She had to be honest with him. False hope was no good.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Some other time."

NED walked on to the house with her. The front door was locked and they went around to the back. As Debbie anticipated, they found Gammy working in the garden. She wore an old tweed skirt, burlap knee pads, inventions of her own that were sewn nattily to bicycle pants guards, easy to slip on and off her bony legs. Her old blue sweater was freckled with dots of Black Leaf 40 and the old carpenter's apron she wore was bulging with clippers, a trowel and wisps of trailing raffia.

"Hi, precious," Debbie called, ready to kick Ned in the shins if he gave one slightest chuckle.

Ned, the sly duck, gave Gammy a big smile. "Boy, have you got roses in your cheeks," he said. "Wish mother would take a little interest in our garden. A little sun and fresh air would do her good."

Gammy had taught his mother in the third grade when the Manchester Grammar School stood on the property now occupied by the Professional Building.

"Here," Gammy said, "take some of these McGredys to your mother. They're real nice this year."

Ned went off with a dozen of the fragrant roses wrapped in an old newspaper.

"A nice boy," Gammy said as she went inside with Debbie.

"Did anyone phone?" Debbie asked anxiously.

"No, he didn't," Gammy said, busy washing her hands at the kitchen sink. "Why you waste your time mooning over Rocky when you can have a nice boy like Ned, I'll never know."

"Ned is good for me," Debbie agreed. "He can't bear the sight of Rocky. It's wonderful to sit back and listen to him prophesy Rocky's ruin and damnation."

Gammy glanced at her quickly. "You agree with Ned?"

"I wouldn't know," Debbie said. "I doubt women will ever be his downfall. He never calls me anymore."

"He's too busy to chase the girls."

"That's no consolation when I sit here night after night and he doesn't call and he doesn't call. I'm very lucky to have Ned to take me places, that's what. At least Ned is a gentleman." Debbie was getting excited. "He doesn't roar like a bull when he's mad nor throw back his head and bray like a jackass when he's amused."

"Every man, chick and child has his ghost," Gammy said. "With Rocky it's insecurity. That's his ghost. His father never amounted to much, sort of a promoter, always away up in the money or away down in debt. Of course he died when he was down. You have to admire Rocky for taking on his father's obligations and all. The trouble is he keeps branching out, afraid to depend on any one thing, afraid he might lose it."

"He's going to lose more than he thinks," Debbie said. "He overdoes that budget business."

Gammy glanced over her shoulder. "You've been feuding with Rocky?"

"No, it's just that he ought to have enough brains to see a girl would like to be in there helping him make a go of things."

"You told him that?"

Debbie said coldly, "Certainly not." She

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stalked into the dining room to set the table. She got out the best silver and two of the best place mats. She was tired of eating in the breakfast room. She was tired of putting up with second best.

THE telephone remained silent. After supper dishes, Debbie changed to her new blue dress and was still fussing with her hair when someone came up the front steps. She stood with a bobby pin poised, listening for the thump of Rocky's knuckles against the panel of the front door. There was no thumping, nothing but the polite buzz of the door bell. That would be Ned. If persistence meant anything, Ned certainly deserved an A for effort.

Half an hour later Debbie was in the game room at the Bittner's watching Robby Roberts and Kiki Verdusco battle each other at singles. The Bittners, senior, were in the book room playing Canasta with another couple. Ned seated her comfortably in a deep rattan chair, his handsome black cocker, Topsy, on the hassock at her feet and a tall iced drink at her elbow.

Debbie tried to get interested in the matches, but she was haunted by the conviction that Rocky had telephoned the minute she left home. She doubted that he had, really, but she wished she dared call Gammy and ask if there was any word from him. Gammy was a night owl, she sat by the radio all evening, knitting and talking back to the announcers.

Ned lounged on the sofa, encouraging Roberts or Verdusco impartially, urging them to get in there and belt that ball. Debbie made a suitable comment ever so often but her heart wasn't in it. She felt as worn as the contestants before Robby Roberts won the third set.

The television camera switched hastily from the wilted players to an announcer who stood near one of the passageways to the snack bar, inviting the passing tennis fans to comment on the matches. He snared Mayor Torrance and his wife, who were always graciously agreeable at such moments; next a Mr. Avery was persuaded to step forward. He took all the credit for getting Kiki Verdusco started on the tennis run. Kiki was not, Mr. Avery said, up to his usual game. The television lighting was not good and the people in the background were lost in blackness.

Debbie's restlessness had eased off. She sat empty, silent, as spiritless as the water-soaked cherry in the bottom of her glass, wondering why people glanced at the camera with such a guilty look when they realized that its eye was upon them.

"That interviewer is a persuasive cuss," said Ned. "Hey, look, he's hooked Annalee Durand and her new mink coat—oh, oh, and a new escort."

He didn't need to point. Debbie leaned forward, her eyes intent on the smiling young man who stood beside the petite Annalee.

"Just a moment, Mrs. Durand." The microphone was extended toward Annalee. "What did you think of the match?"

"Enjoyed every minute," Annalee said, "but I'm no authority." She smiled up at her escort. "Ask Rocky Rhodes, he's the answer boy."

Rocky grinned good-naturedly at the camera. He spoke up, alert and confident, looking right at Debbie it seemed, while Annalee beamed at him. Debbie chewed a tiny corner of her handkerchief to shreds before he moved out of range with Annalee. Another smiling couple took their place.

"He wasn't lying when he said he had a hot business deal on for tonight," Ned said. "Boy, if he can sign up Annalee and her bank roll he's in."

DEBBIE did not move an eyelash. There was unspeakable shock to cope with and it hung over her like the crest of a huge wave about to engulf her.

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"You want to go out in the kitchen and raid the icebox?" Ned asked. "Or would you rather go home and kick the cat around a bit?"

Debbie shook her head. When she was sure her voice was was steady she said, "We may as well watch the doubles. That Kiki is really sensational."

Ned settled down and made no further comment, content to ignore the whole incident, if that was her wish. Debbie lay back in the big chair as quiet as though she were asleep. And all the while she saw nothing but the face of Rocky smiling out at her from that television screen. She was sure she hated him. She could never bear to see him again. She saw herself asking Mrs. Mapes to get one of the other students to take over her work at the malt shop and she saw herself passing Rocky with averted face.

She was grateful to Ned because he admired her, and now that Rocky was revealed in his true light, she liked Ned much better. He deserved something better than a dull, sulky companion.

It seemed to her a long time before she worked up the courage to say, "I can't seem to get my mind off that icebox raid. Do let's take time out."

They went to the kitchen and made grilled cheese and ham sandwiches. Debbie kept striving for bright sayings, reeling off endless chatter, but she couldn't eat her beautiful sandwich. The first bite stuck in her throat and even a sip of milk did not help the situation.

Ned suggested that they take their food back to the game room and there, bit by bit, Debbie secretly fed her sandwich to the dog. "Rocky and Annalee," her mind kept saying. "I knew it was someone. I've felt it for days. I hope I never see him again. Never!"

It was late when Ned drove her home. She stuck doggedly to the television until the doubles match was over, anxious to please Ned, feeling very grateful and gentle toward him. He was unwontedly quiet until he stopped in front of her house.

"You're really through with Rocky, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"That's hard on you, I suppose, but it's my big chance, Debbie." His voice quickened. "You know I'm always waiting, thinking of you—"

Debbie sighed and got out of the car without waiting for him to finish.

"Please don't," she said impatiently. "I don't want you waiting for me. I don't want anyone waiting for me."

"That's the way it is?"

She was stung by a wave of added sorrow but she turned away and hurried up the driveway. "That's the way it is," she said.

SHE paused abruptly. There, in the driveway, parked in the shadow of the bougainvillaea, was Rocky's old roadster.

Debbie dared not think. She resolutely refused to think. She merely turned to Ned, said only, "Good night," and walked away from him and up the steps to the front door.

The latch was not on. She marched into the living room and found Gammy and Rocky intent on a game of chess. They both glanced up and stared at her. She paused, she wished she had known Rocky would be here. The wind had blown her hair and she hadn't bothered to freshen her lipstick before she left the Bittner's. She felt positively haggard, yet there sat Rocky in his new gray suit, every hair in place, looking pressed and polished, entirely self-possessed.

He got to his feet slowly. "Have a good time?" he asked.

"Thought you were tied up," she managed to say. "Important business deal."

"So I was."

Debbie stood staring at him in numb despair. She wet her lips. "You're sure it was business?"

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"Hey, what's wrong? I told you I'd come by if I could make it and here I am."

"And you can go," Debbie said. Anger burned out the frustration, the despair. "You are not only a liar, you are also a jilt."

Rocky flushed darkly. "What is it, Debbie? What has Ned Bittner been telling you?"

"When I see you with Annalee Durand with my own two eyes, no one has to tell me anything."

"Now wait a minute—"

"Wait for what?" Words built up in Debbie faster than she could get rid of them. She all but stuttered. "Anytime you want to j-jilt me for that cheap, sleezy, man-chasing divorcée you are welcome to do so, Mister Rhodes. I don't pretend to have money and I don't pretend to have brains. I'm just me and I'm ashamed that I ever cluttered up my mind m-mooning around over you." She fumbled with the catch on her wrist watch. She tossed the watch at his feet. "You're not so smart, you know. You haven't brains enough to know that a girl doesn't want things all nice and soft. She wants to share things with the man she loves, no matter if they're good or bad. All that big talk about you slaving from morning to night on the San Tomas job. Ha! Why didn't you say you meant Annalee!"

Her throat closed. He reached out a hand to her but Debbie hit it down with her clenched fist. Tears blinded her, she turned and ran toward the hallway and her bedroom. Rocky started after her but she slammed the hall door in his face. Bang went her own bedroom door after her. She heard the key clatter to the floor. She also heard Rocky's quick, firm steps following her. Ah, but he wouldn't dare—or would he? In quick panic she grasped the door knob and braced her shoulder against the door. Slowly the knob turned in her grasp. The door opened and pushed her back.

SHE groped for the light switch but Rocky's hand closed over her wrist. For a moment she struggled frenziedly.

"Let me go!"

Rocky's arms were hard and fierce around her.

"Please," she begged in a sort of terror. "Turn on the light."

His kiss fell at the corner of her mouth, not lovingly, but roughly hurting.

"No!" She was frightened and yet filled with a bitter rapture. "Don't, please don't."

She yielded to the pressure of his arms, despite herself. Presently his hot cheek came down sweetly against her own.

"Say you love me, Debbie!"

"No!"

"Say it."

The words were a sigh, a whisper, "I love you."

"Now keep that temper of yours under cover for two seconds. You saw me at the matches with Annalee, is that it?"

"No," Debbie said. "Television."

"Didn't you see her brother?"

"The background was all black," Debbie admitted. "But Annalee was smiling—"

"Certainly she was smiling," Rocky said. "She's bought the San Tomas drive-in and that's enough to make anyone smile."

"You didn't tell me anything—"

"You squawked against the San Tomas deal from the first."

"So did Mrs. Mapes and Ned."

"Look, Debbie, from now on you leave the business end of our partnership to me, eh?" It was an order not a question. "Now we can get married and move into a gnat-sized apartment and make our battles legal."

"No, Rocky, no more quarrels." Her tone was tender, exhausted but happy.

She cupped his face in her hands. She kissed his chin, his lips. For a moment they held that kiss. Slowly, reluctantly, he reached up and switched on the light.

"Come on, Debbie, let's break the news to Gammy."

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Anything for a Pal

By BILL SEVERN

Eddie could be trusted with Mack's girl—as long as he didn't kiss her.

THERE WAS A laziness in the evening. Couples strolled slowly, relaxing under the trees after the exhaustion of a hot summer day. But Eddie McKay's steps were quick and his frown impatient as he got off the Fifth Avenue bus at the entrance to the park.

He didn't know the girl or want to know her. There was work waiting at the apartment, a sales report he had brought home to finish. All Eddie wanted was a cold shower and a chance to get down to it. But anything for a pal. He owed Mack plenty and it wasn't so much a matter of owing as being about as close as two guys can be. A favor between friends.

The old fashioned horse-drawn buggies, reserved for tourists and those touched with romance, competed with taxis on the park roadway. Eddie had nothing against romance when he was in the mood. He had found his share and Mack had, too. But this was something else, going overboard the way Mack has with her. Talking about marriage and a little place in Jersey.

Eddie counted the benches along the walk. Mack had said, "She'll be waiting where she meets me when she gets through work. Eddie, I wouldn't ask, but there's no way I can get her on the phone. I don't want Carol sitting there, thinking I stood her up."

According to Mack's glowing description, she would be a combination of Jane Russell, Betty Grable and Hedy Lamarr. Tall, dark-haired and lovely. Also a sweet kid, the kind who would make a perfect wife. Mack could go on for hours and he had.

The fifth bench. Eddie saw her and she wasn't bad. Maybe not all Mack had said, but enough to hold Eddie where he was a second. His eyes took a slow return trip and a slight grin replaced his frown. She turned a little and the effect was even better. Eddie felt his pulses giving his mind ideas and shook himself out of the momentary trance. She was Mack's and strictly hands off. He went over. "Carol Holden?"

Her eyes had started to freeze him out, probably thinking it was a pick-up. But as he said her name, they lifted to his questioningly. Dark eyes that matched everything else about her. Eddie watched the deep red of her mouth say, "Yes."

"I'm Eddie McKay." He found he was having trouble gathering his thoughts. "Mack couldn't make it. The boss sent

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him out to LaGuardia Field to meet a buyer, flying in tonight from Cleveland. There was no way Mack could reach you."

"Oh." She did look disappointed. But then she smiled. "It's awfully nice of you to tell me. I hope it wasn't too far out of your way."

"No trouble at all."

Carol picked up her purse and gloves. Standing, she nodded. "Well, thanks."

"Look, as long as you—" Eddie's conscience halted him. But there was no reason for that. She was Mack's girl and the least he could do was to be nice to her. He said, "Mack's told me so much about you."

"I feel like I know you, too, Eddie."

"WE REALLY ought to get acquainted, now that we've met." Eddie's grin came back. "You were expecting Mack to take you to dinner. I haven't eaten yet, either. Why don't we have something together?"

She hesitated. "I don't want you to feel you should. I mean, if you have something else to do—"

"It'll keep." He thought of the report he had meant to work on. But there still would be time for that, after he put Carol in a taxi and sent her home.

"All right," she said. "I'd like to, Eddie."

They went to the restaurant in the park, carrying their trays through the cafeteria and taking them to a table outside on the stone terrace. Mack hadn't mentioned that smile or the way her eyes crinkled at the corners when she laughed.

Eddie learned a lot of other things about her. He liked listening to her talk. Carol came from Ohio and she had been in the city a year. She worked for an advertising agency and had hoped to become a copy writer. "But it doesn't seem so important," she said, "now that I'm getting married."

"You and Mack." He glanced down. Lightly, he said, "He has all the luck."

"Thanks. I know how much you think of Mack."

"The best they come." Eddie put sugar in his coffee and stirred it. "Saved my life when we smashed up in a car. Pulled me out and took me to the hospital. He ever tell you about it?"

"Yes." She nodded. "And you saved him once when you went swimming together and he hit his head on a rock."

"Oh, that." Eddie brushed it off. "I just yelled for help. We were at Scout camp."

"That's not the way he tells it." Carol smiled once more, her eyes finding his. "Mack said you were always like brothers. The way your family took him in and brought you up together after his folks died."

"We still are. Sharing the apartment and working for the same company. Mack got me the job with Acme Sales."

THEY TALKED on about Mack awhile. That was their excuse for being there and it was as though Mack were sitting in with them on the evening he had missed. If Eddie wished she weren't Mack's, that he had met Carol first, it was as far as he meant to let his wishes go.

Girls were girls. A date, a dance, a kiss. Maybe a couple of dates more. Eddie never took them seriously. Time for that after he had gone places and done things and made his success.

Mack had been that way, too. A lot of gals and a lot of fun. Cutting each other's time and laughing over it. Just like they bucked each other on the job. It would be different with Mack married.

"You know," Carol said, breaking into his thoughts, "I was afraid of you, Eddie. Mack's been asking me to meet you, but I kept putting it off. I wanted you to like me because of Mack and I—I didn't think you would."

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"Me?" He grinned. "What's he been telling you? I'm practically harmless."

"It wasn't anything Mack said." She smiled. "Just the impression I got that you'd decided I was a designing female trying to drag your buddy up the aisle of a church and wreck his life." She frowned slightly. "You may not believe it, but it was the other way around. Mack proposed the second time I went out with him. He's still proposing."

"I thought that was all settled." Eddie wondered at the little lift in his voice, the hope he quickly stilled. Whether they were formally engaged or not, she was Mack's. Anyhow, she wasn't the type for a fling at romance, not his type. She's the settling-down type.

"Mack knows I want to marry him," she answered slowly. "It isn't that I'm not sure."

"Then?"

"Money." She looked up. "It's all right to say you can live on love, but you can't. I know. My family never had a cent. It takes money to buy a house and run it and the sort of marriage that always has to be hiding from bill collectors and pinching pennies isn't much fun." She shook her head. "Now, you do think I'm a mercenary creature, don't you?"

"No," Eddie said. "You make a lot of sense." That had been his argument with Mack. And yet, it did bother him to hear her saying it. If Carol were as sure as she claimed, if she loved Mack enough, there ought to be some way they could work it out. That was their security, not waiting for Mack to become a millionaire.

Eddie checked his annoyance, realizing he wasn't being fair. Carol didn't want a millionaire. She was just being practical. He wondered if his own wishful thinking had tempted him with the idea that she didn't love Mack enough.

"If Mack gets the promotion he's been talking about," Carol went on, "maybe we can make a go of it then. But don't you see, I can't tie him down to just scraping by because of me. It scares me, Eddie."

Her words struck hard, sneaking up on him with their punch. Eddie felt as though a fist had hit him in the stomach and knocked out his breath. He had been bucking Mack for that vacant chair behind the district manager's desk at Acme Sales. It would go to one of them. Eddie and Mack had narrowed down the field so the competition was between them. But Mack had never let him guess it would mean this much.

Eddie looked across the table at Carol. But she didn't know he wanted it, too. Eddie was sure of that. Some girls might work on a guy's pal, throwing it to him that way. Carol wouldn't. Eddie saw her glance at her watch. "It's early yet," he told her. "How about another cup of coffee?"

"I should be getting home."

He should be sending her home. But Eddie said, "As long as I'm standing in for Mack, why don't we catch a movie or something?"

"Well, I—"

"Mack won't be all night," he interrupted, taking her arm. "We'll see an early show and then go back to the apartment and wait for him. At least, you'll have part of your date. Why didn't he think of that?"

THE PICTURE was funny and Eddie enjoyed it even more, hearing Carol's laughter. She let herself go, not just a bored smile, pretending she was too sophisticated to be amused by the slapstick antics on the screen.

"My sides ache," she said as they left the theater. Her fingers slipped back under his arm again, hugging there impulsively. "Oh, Eddie, wasn't it good?"

He grinned. "They don't make enough of them like that." He started to signal for a cab.

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"Don't waste your money, Eddie. Can't we walk?"

"Too far," he said. "But we can get the bus on the Avenue."

There was a moon and a lot of stars and a wind that caught in her hair. A night Mack shouldn't have missed with Carol. Her eyes were all dancing with the lights they passed and the whole excitement of the city seemed to be in her smile as Eddie helped her aboard the bus. He looked away.

"Mack never told me where you live." Carol spoke as though she were thinking aloud. "No reason he should have, I guess. But it is odd I never asked. Mack always came for me or we met somewhere. I thought your place was uptown."

"Probably a lot you don't know about Mack," he joked.

"Tell me the worst." She smiled. "Give me the low-down on my husband-to-be, Eddie."

"He snores and leaves the cap off the toothpaste. Lately, he's been acting like a guy who's in love."

"Has he?" Carol's voice softened. "I guess the feeling's mutual. I love him."

"You guess?"

She laughed. "I know."

"How?" Eddie asked.

"What a question." Carol made a face. "How would any girl know? How do you know when you're in love?"

"I've never been in love." He grinned a bit. "Oh, there was a girl in high school and I thought I loved her, but it was only because she liked to kiss between dances." He looked out the window. "This is where we get off." Reaching up, he pulled the cord.

GLANCING at the third floor of the apartment building as they walked down the block, Eddie saw there was no light. But Mack would be back soon. He took out his key and Carol said, "I hope he'll think this was a good idea. Maybe I should have waited for Mack to invite me."

"It's a better idea than he had." Eddie opened the door.

"I shouldn't be waiting on his doorstep." She went ahead of him to the stairs. "Mack may be tired when he gets in. He'll have to take me all the way uptown again."

"He won't be that tired." With another grin, Eddie lifted his glance from her legs and followed her up the steps. He reached past her at the top to unlock the apartment door and snap on the light inside. "Make yourself at home. I'll fix us a couple of drinks."

"This is nice." She entered slowly, looking around. "Bigger than mine. And a fireplace." She crossed the room. "Does it work?"

"Sure." He nodded to the couch. "Too bad it isn't winter. We could light some logs and cuddle up in front of—" He caught himself, frowning over the slip of his tongue. It was his mind that had slipped. He tried to cover it with a laugh. "You and Mack, I mean."

A slight flush touched Carol's cheeks. "It is a little warm for that." She turned to the table, looking away from him as she glanced at the typewriter. "Somebody working overtime?"

"Just a sales report." He took two glasses from the shelf. "I'll make those drinks."

He mixed them and sat next to her on the couch and a little silence fell between them, as though they had run out of things to say. Carol edged forward slightly, looking at her finger as it played around the rim of the glass. They both started to speak at the same time.

Carol laughed and Eddie got to his feet. "Might as well have some music." He turned on the radio. "Wonder what's keeping Mack?"

She glanced at her watch. "It's almost

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eleven. Goodness, I didn't know it was that late."

"Like to dance?" He held out his arms.

Carol looked up and her eyes darted from him. She smiled and she stood without answering. Eddie felt her lingering hesitation as she came to him.

He took her in his arms and knew right away it would have been better to go on talking. She was warm and sweet and all alive in his arms. And the beat of the drums came loud in the music.

Eddie felt the tiny nervousness in her fingers, the pulses that leaped to his. He realized whatever he was thinking, Carol was, too. The self-consciousness that had come over him wasn't his alone.

But it was wrong. Fighting himself, he danced her around the room, fighting to keep the music in his mind and nothing else. That and the knowledge Carol wasn't just a girl he and Mack could kid about and forget.

The music broke for a commercial and Eddie stopped dancing. He saw her eyes were closed. Carol was smiling as though she didn't know the song had ended. Her lips were parted slightly with the smile, her mouth so near, Eddie couldn't drop his arms.

Her eyes blinked open suddenly. She lost her smile. Stepping back quickly, she said, "Eddie, I think you'd better take me home. I—I mean whenever Mack comes in, it'll be too late to—to—"

"Guess you're right." He turned from her. Crossing to the radio, Eddie turned it off and forced his grin. "We all have to work in the morning."

"Yes." She picked up her purse and gloves. "That's what I mean."

HE KEPT to his own side of the taxi on the way uptown. But it didn't help. It hadn't been having her in the apartment or dancing with her. He felt the same way about Carol here. And if they had been in a subway or a Fifth Avenue parade, it wouldn't have been any different.

He was the guy who always said it couldn't happen. Strangers didn't just meet and fall in love. But it did and it had and he was. He had been around enough to know this wasn't just a yen for a girl. He was in love with Carol. And that shouldn't happen to Mack's best friend.

Eddie helped her from the cab when they reached the converted brownstone house where she lived and he was almost afraid to take her arm. He said, "Well, I'm glad we met, Carol." He made his grin and it felt pasted there. "I'll quit worrying over Mack now that I know he has you."

"Thank you, sir." She seemed to have as much trouble with her smile. "It has been fun. You're nice, too."

He held out his hand. "Good night."

Carol's head lifted and her smile wavered against what she must have seen in his eyes. Her fingers touched his as though she wanted to hold him there an instant longer. Maybe she didn't mean it any more than Eddie meant to take her in his arms. He kissed her.

He felt the tiny trembling in her hands upon his shoulders and the catch in her breathing as she pressed close. His own breath stilled and his heart raced against it. Eddie heard himself say her name in a husky whisper that wasn't his. His kisses touched her cheeks, her eyes, brushed back the softness of her hair and took her throbbing mouth once more.

The momentary willingness of her arms, her own eagerness of surrender, swept his pulses with a fresh desire. But there was a gentleness in it, too, a want that went beyond this urgency, a hope that Eddie knew he dared not to have.

As if Carol had sensed it and her mind had come to understand what was happening as his had at last, Carol stiffened in his arms. "Eddie, no." It was hardly

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a denial, but she pushed away. "Please—"

Her words brought him reason. Eddie stepped back and looked at her and there was nothing he could say. For Mack, he was sorry. And for her. But there was no apology he could make for himself. The truth would be worse. He couldn't say, "Carol, I wasn't making a pass at you. I love you and there's nothing I can do about it, but I do."

She was as silent. There was no anger in her face, but no smile. She didn't show him her eyes. Her head down, she turned to the door and opened it and went in. She climbed the stairs without looking back.

MACK WAS fixing himself a sandwich when Eddie returned to the apartment. "Hi, Ed." He held up the plate. "Want one?"

"No." Eddie shook his head. "You should have come home earlier, Mack. You missed—"

"I saw the lipstick on the glass." Mack laughed. "Have yourself a party?"

"We were waiting for you. I'm trying to tell you—"

"I'll bet." Mack winked. "Sorry, fellow. I wouldn't be interested. I've got my girl."

"Carol was waiting for you." Eddie turned his back, taking off his jacket. He hoped his voice was as casual as he tried to make it sound. "You didn't show up, so I finally got her a cab."

"She was here?"

Eddie unknotted his tie, still not facing Mack. "I figured you'd have a couple of hours together. She was so disappointed when I told her you couldn't keep the date, I took her to supper and the movies. We thought you'd be back by then. Sat around listening to the radio awhile, but she finally decided she'd better get her sleep."

Mack didn't answer for a second. He laughed then, as if he were brushing aside his thoughts. "Thanks, Ed. I'm glad you gave her a little fun. But I didn't mean to let you in for that." He came over, putting his hand on Eddie's shoulder. "I know you wanted to get out your report tonight."

"Forget it, Mack."

"Anything for a pal, huh?" He slapped Eddie's shoulder. "Well, what do you think of her? I take it you two hit it off okay."

Remembering the sweet warmth of her in his arms, Carol's mouth held to his, Eddie felt sick with the lie. "We talked about you," he said. "She's all right. Nice kid."

"But not your type," Mack kidded. "You wait, guy. Someday, you'll fall just as hard. There'll be somebody like Carol and you'll throw away that little black book and be glad—"

"Sure, sure." Eddie cut him off. "You and Carol and the house in Jersey. Spare me the details, will you? It's getting late. Let's hit the sack."

It was on the way to the office the next morning that Mack suggested a double date. Eddie tried to put him off. "All right," Mack said. "Skip it. You think Carol's a droop. Why don't you say it?"

"Hey—"

"I know she's not sophisticated, Ed." Mack's face flushed. "She's from a hick town in Ohio and she's only been in the city a year. Maybe Carol doesn't know how to wear clothes and the right things to laugh at. But that's not important to me. I'm not ashamed of her."

EDDIE STARED at him. He hadn't noticed Carol's clothes, except that they were attractive. Her lack of sophisticated pretense was plain honesty. Everything about Carol was real. What she believed, she would say and do. Mack's feeling that he had to apologize for her bothered Eddie. He couldn't have Mack

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thinking that was why he didn't want a double date.

"All I meant was I can't make it tonight," Eddie said. "I've got that work to finish up. How about Tuesday? I'll get myself a girl and we'll all do the town."

Mostly because she was a girl Mack hadn't met, Eddie made the date with Heidee Lawrence. He didn't want any embarrassing complications that would involve Mack with the dates they had shared before Carol.

Heidee was a redhead and she talked too much about modern art, but a man could always look at her if he didn't feel like listening. She was a model for a wholesale dress company and had the figure for it, along with a vacantly beautiful face that struck poses of being intellectual.

Eddie let her talk, nodding now and then, as he and Heidee waited in the night-club lounge for Mack to show up with Carol. Mack was late and Eddie smoked too many cigarettes and hoped his nervousness wouldn't show.

When Carol finally arrived, she looked uneasy, too. She also looked lovely, as if she had brought the fresh night air and the stars into this smoke-heavy, chattery lobby with her. "Hello, Eddie." She smiled, but her eyes didn't meet his.

Eddie made the introductions and they went in and got a table. Over the small talk, he stole a couple of glances at Carol. She was looking at Mack and frowning slightly and Eddie saw why.

Mack wasn't being obvious, but the drift of his eyes in Heidee's direction was decidedly male. Well, Mack was human. But with Carol there, it annoyed Eddie. "Shall we order?" he asked, breaking it up. "What'll it be?"

They had their cocktails. When he took Heidee out to the floor to dance, she gave him one of her most-amused smiles. "Such a big torch you carry, Eddie. You and little Miss Ohio." Heidee patted his arm. "I don't mind. Mack's rather cute."

Eddie stopped dancing and he couldn't hold the anger from his voice. "Mack and Carol are going to be married. He's my pal. What do you think I am?"

"Happy little triangle, isn't it?" Heidee answered, still amused. "People are staring at us, sweet. I don't like to be conspicuous. Anyhow, I know you'd rather be with her."

"Stop trying to imagine things." He took her back to the table.

The waiter brought dinner and Eddie wished the evening were over and he was out of it. Heidee's knowing smile didn't help. He didn't even glance at Carol. If Heidee had guessed, so would Mack. But Mack knew better, didn't he?

Mack stood. "Dance, Heidee?"

"I'd like to."

Eddie couldn't keep them there. Mack moved away with the redhead and he and Carol were alone. He should ask her to dance. It would be better than sitting there. The floor was crowded. They wouldn't have to make talk. Eddie offered her a grin. "Shall we?"

CAROL CAME to him and he shut his eyes, fighting the memory of that night in the apartment and taking her home, the momentary willingness that had held her clinging to him even more closely than she was now.

The lights were brighter here, the rhythm of the drums a sand-brush whispering covered by muted trumpets. But beating beneath the melody, beating in him.

"Mack seems to be enjoying himself," Carol said. "She is attractive."

"You don't have to worry."

She raised her head. The smile was there, wavering a moment in doubt. "I suppose I should be jealous, but I'm not."

"Jealous of Heidee?" Eddie laughed. "Mack's only being polite."

Carol was silent a minute, dancing with him. "Eddie, when you— The other

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night—" Her voice dropped, but she asked directly, "Eddie, why did you kiss me?"

There was an honesty in the question, a simplicity hard to evade. Carol was like that. She wanted the answers straight. "It just happened," Eddie lied. "Big moon. Pretty girl."

"No. It wouldn't have just happened. You forgot I was Mack's girl and so did I. It took more than a moon. You're not like that. I'm not. But I wanted you to kiss me."

"Carol!"

"Oh, Eddie. Are you going to make me say it for you?" Her steps halted. "I'm in love with you."

"You love Mack." Eddie gripped her elbows. "He loves you."

She shook her head. "You'd do anything for Mack, wouldn't you? But don't you see, you can't do this. You can't give me to Mack if I don't want him."

Eddie realized the music had stopped. People were staring now. He took Carol's arm and led her toward the table.

If he weren't here, if they hadn't met, she would marry Mack and be happy. Except for Mack, he wouldn't be alive. The night the car had skidded, the terrible screaming agony of that crash. Mack in as much pain as he was, but struggling to pull him out, giving the last of his strength to save him. And all the other times since they were kids, the good times and the bad, and now this girl Mack had loved first.

MAYBE IT would be hard to live without her. But there were other things Eddie couldn't live without. Honor and decency and self-respect. Big words, but they did mean something. Even Carol wouldn't go on loving a man who couldn't like himself.

Eddie said, "Carol has a headache, Mack. She wants you to take her home."

"I—" Carol's eyes searched his an instant. Her glance fell. "Yes," she said quietly. "I'd like to go. Sorry, Mack. I hate to spoil the party."

"Getting late, anyhow." Eddie turned to Heidee. "We might as well go along, too." He reached for the check, smiling as he took it from Mack. "We can drop Carol off first."

Mack sat between Carol and Heidee in the cab, while Eddie took the jump seat facing them. It was a short ride across town but it seemed forever. Eddie didn't watch as Mack took Carol up to her door.

When they left Heidee at her apartment, Mack asked, "What happened?"

"Nothing." Eddie took a cigarette, holding the pack out to Mack. "How do you mean?"

"You and Carol."

"She had a headache." Eddie shrugged.

Mack apparently decided to let it go. He sat back, looking up at the roof of the cab. "That Heidee's something," he said after a minute. "You've been holding out on me, fellow."

"Yeah." Eddie took a deep drag. "But not the girl for that little house in Jersey."

Mack laughed. "That's different."

Eddie was checking through the file cards on his desk the next morning, lining up the day's prospects, when he got the word that the boss wanted to see him. He looked over at Mack's desk. Mack was already out making calls, plugging for sales, crowding two days into every one in the hope it would get him something.

"If Mack gets the promotion he's been talking about," Carol had said, "maybe we can make a go of it then." Eddie snapped a rubber band around the cards and tossed them to his desk. He didn't know what the boss was going to tell him, but Eddie knew what he was going to say.

He opened the door. The boss had a smile and Eddie gave him a grin. But he

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said it first. "I'd like to get out on the road again," Eddie told him. "Maybe working out of the Philadelphia office. I never was a man to sit behind a desk. Now, take Mack. He'll settle for a steady salary and that nine-to-five routine. Wants to get married—"

Philadelphia was a lonely place, but plenty of opportunity for the man willing to make it. A good salesman could always get by. Eddie took a hotel room. Being alone and out on the road every day, there was no need for an apartment. He made his calls and did his job and smiled a bit over the letter he got from Mack the end of the first week he was there.

Mack didn't mention Carol. But Eddie hoped she was happy, too, now that Mack had his promotion. Carol would forget, even if Eddie couldn't.

Running a comb through his hair, he straightened his tie and tilted a grin at the mirror. There were girls in Philadelphia. He whistled to himself as he locked the room door. Jingling the key in his hand, he walked to the elevator and pressed the button. But even to himself, it sounded like a man whistling along a deserted street in the dark.

THE ELEVATOR stopped and Eddie moved to the back. A blonde got on at the third floor. She gave him a little glance. Eddie looked a minute and then looked away. He took his grin and quit kidding himself. There weren't any others.

He bought a pack of cigarettes in the lobby and went out to have his dinner. He found a movie and sat through as much of it as he could, listening to everybody laugh and remembering her laughter. He went back to the hotel.

Pushing through the revolving door, he started toward the elevators. He heard his name and halted. He turned.

She got up from the chair where she had been waiting and came over to him. Smiling, she said, "Mack couldn't make it, Eddie."

He believed it when he heard her voice. It wasn't a trick of his mind; it wasn't his heart putting her there. Eddie tried to speak and couldn't and he took her in has arms and kissed her.

She clung to him and when he finally moved her back, Eddie saw she was crying. Crying and smiling, too. And his eyes weren't too clear.

"Carol, you told him?"

"No." Holding his arms, she looked up at him. "Mack told me, Eddie. It wasn't any use trying to pretend I could ever marry him. He knew. Mack said you should kiss me for him. And if you ever need a best man—"

Eddie grinned. "He's got himself a job." He kissed her again. One for Mack. But the rest were strictly his.

No Question

What did my darling see in me?
Each day I marvel, humble anew;
But I'm not asking, for fear that he
Will begin to marvel, too!

—May Richstone

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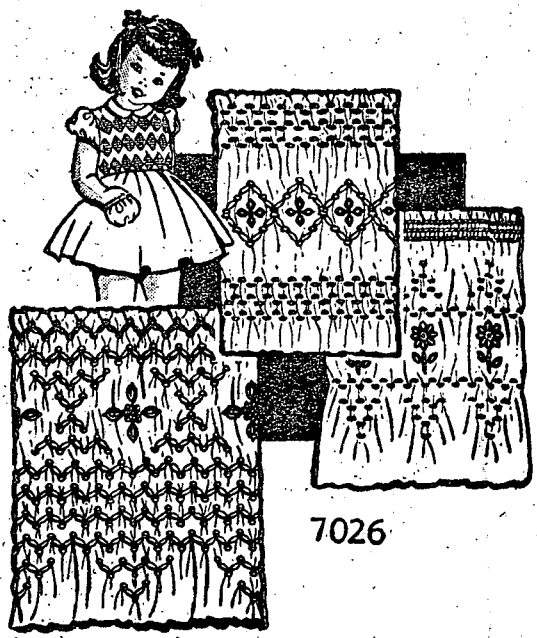
Needlework Patterns 20c Each



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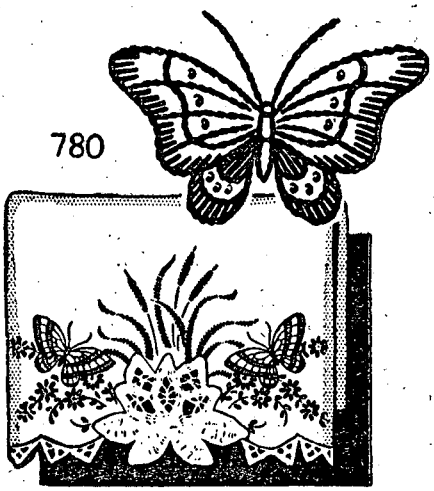

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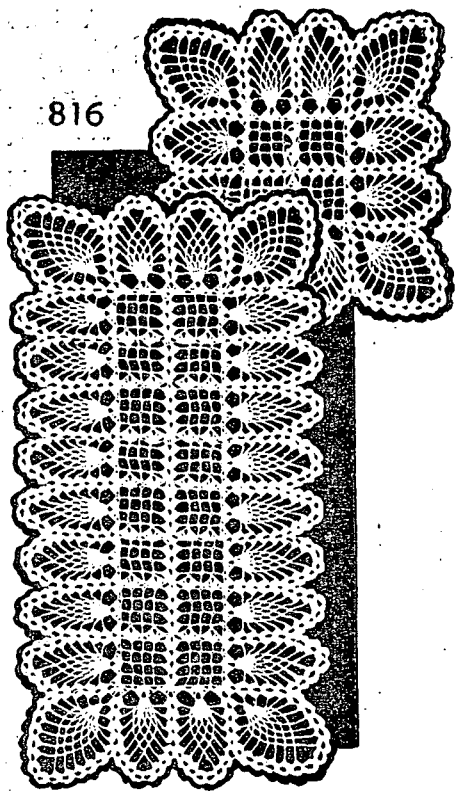

816

7026 Here's a bit of needle cheer for women who like smocking. The pattern shows how each thread follows through. Five designs. Smock a straight piece then cut garment. Directions; charts, 5 designs.

780 A good hostess adorns her linens with lovely floral motifs. Crochet and embroidery, beautifully combined here. Transfer 6 motifs 5 x 12 inches; chochet directions given.

816 Jiffy crochet design for large or small scarf, lunch-mats, buffet-set. Done in double or single strand string. Crochet directions are included.

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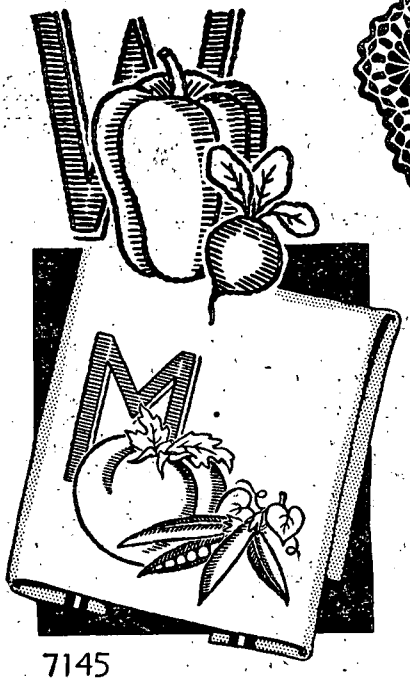
7145 These towels are quick, easy and so gay. These single stitches make an interesting pattern. Has a bit of outline stitch also. Transfer of 7 motifs about 5½ x 7 inches. Directions.



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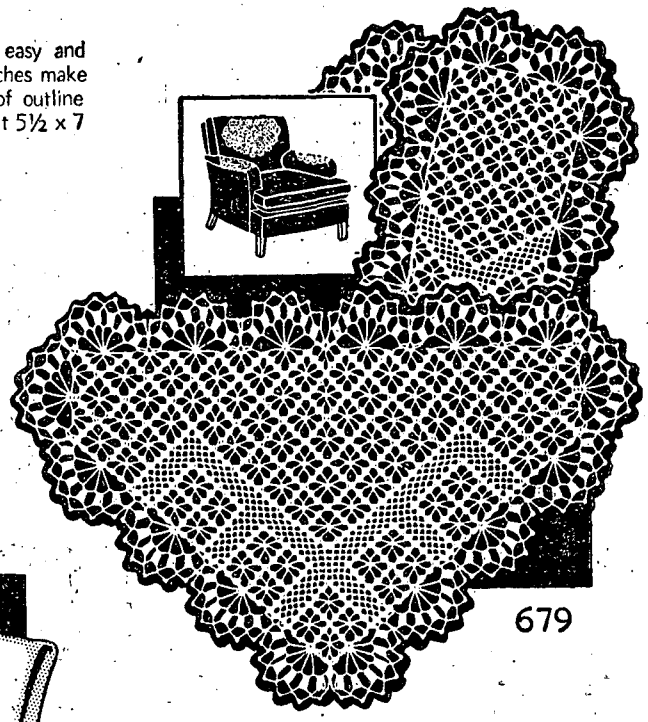
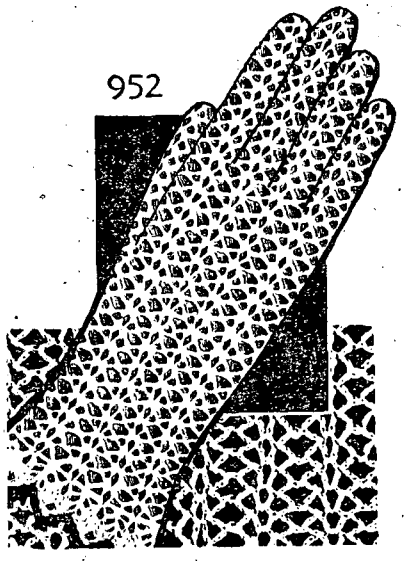


679

679 Make your furniture more attractive with lacy spider-web crochet like this. So appropriate on your chairs and buffet. Pattern has complete crochet directions.

952 Jiffy string gloves to complete every summer outfit. Just double crochet and chain stitch make this pair. Crochet directions, small, medium and large.



952

LOVE SHORT STORIES, 266 August, 1950
Needlecraft Service
P. O. Box 162, Old Chelsea Station
New York 11, New York

I am enclosing TWENTY-FIVE CENTS (in coins) for each pattern. TWENTY CENTS more for the Needlework Catalog.

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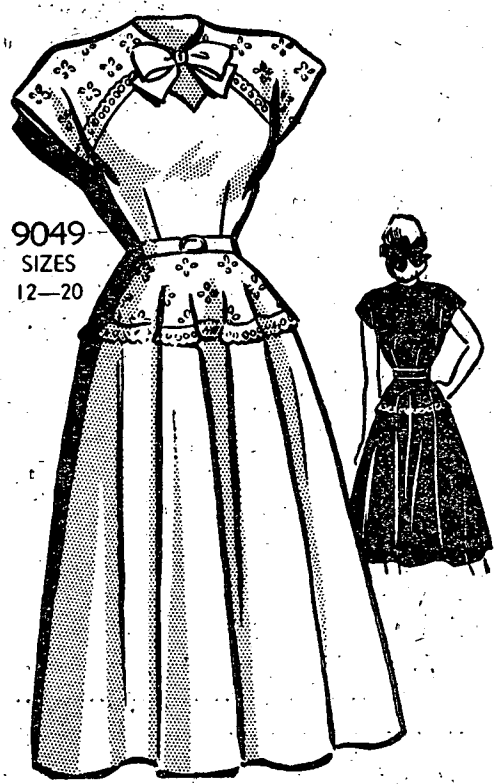
Dress Patterns 25c Each

9017 Ideal three-piece outfit for your young lady. Button-and-tie-on skirt makes it a dress. Open or closed midriff. Easy to sew. Sizes 6-14. Size 10 bra, shorts and skirt take 3¾ yards 35-inch material.

9049 Feminine little charmer with basque top, eyelet yokes and edge trim. Lantern skirt has matching yoke. Sizes 12-20. Size 16 takes 3⅞ yards; ¾ yard 35-inch contrasting material.

9459 Cool and refreshing wrap-tie sundress—just three main pattern parts. Add chic pockets, and belt. Sizes 12-20; 30-42. Size 16 requires 4¾ yards of 35-inch fabric.



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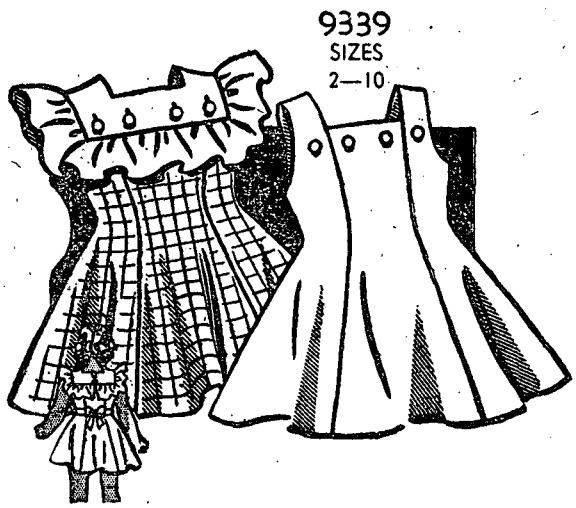
9339 Variety for the littlest—detachable collar. Bloomers, bonnet patterns are included. Sizes 2 to 10. Size 6 takes 1⅝ yards; ⅝ yard contrast; bonnet, ¾ yard of 35-inch material.



9337 An exciting sunfrock idea—add that gay little bow-tied and button-on cape for more chic. Make it in a crisp cotton material. Sizes 12-20. Size 16 sunsemble, cape takes 3 yards; 1⅝ yards of 35-inch contrasting material.

4679 A charming frock that you'll be glad to have this season and the ones to come. The neckline and pocket detail is a Parisian trick. Sew it easily. Sizes 12-20; 30-42. Size 16 takes 3⅝ yards of 39-inch material.

LOVE SHORT STORIES, 227 August, 1950
Pattern Department
243 W. 17th St.
New York 11, New York

I am enclosing TWENTY-FIVE CENTS (in coins) for each pattern. TWENTY CENTS more for the new Pattern Book.

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KISS ME NOT

By SARA ELLIS

In one day Susie lost a dream—and acquired a fiance!

SUSIE'S heart matched the pounding of the waves breaking on the Gulf beach. From the pavilion counter where she ladled orange juice, she spotted Blake Bennett's gray sedan pulling into a parking space. In another moment he would stride up the three wooden steps, across the board porch and step inside, blinking a moment until his hazel eyes with their thick black lashes became adjusted to the shade. Then he would smile, his teeth white and even against his eight weeks sun tan, and the corners of his eyes would crinkle, and Susie would spill orange juice all over the floor. Then he would say, "Let me take over. You're such a little girl to be handling such a hard job," and they would laugh and talk for maybe five minutes. Then Blake would say he had better get back to the office as his Uncle John didn't understand anyone who took more than a half hour off at noon. Susie would think, Uncle John should know. He owns half the town. And inside her a small voice would cry, And you, Susie Smith, are the daughter of the pavilion owner. You're a little Miss Nobody.

The bright spot of the day would be over. Oh, there was lean, leathery, blue-eyed Frank Horton, who ran a fishing boat during the day. Frank would be by to ask Susie if there was a show in town they could see that night. Frank was nice enough. He called her Blue Eyes and told her he cared a lot. But to Susie anyone would be an anticlimax after Blake.

Susie kept telling herself she was a fool to let this big, dark man from New York creep into her thoughts or her heart. She would start acting cool, composed, uninterested. She would ignore him.

To her surprise, Blake said, "Never mind the orange juice, Susie. The boss is away, and his favorite nephew's going to play. First, a swim, then a hamburger and a beer, and then a long walk on the beach." He leaned against the counter a moment and Susie backed away. Not that she didn't want to be near him. She didn't like the way she trembled inside when he grinned at her in that intimate way, as though she were the only girl in the world.

That was a laugh. The only girl in the world. All Susie had to do was pick up the paper and read about Blake and Elise Johnson. Elise of the jet black hair and the cream convertible. Or that wild blonde named Karen who had changed her

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"But you didn't mean to kiss me. You're sorry it happened, aren't you," she asked bitterly.

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last name twice, who owned a sail boat, and whose family made millions in steel.

Blake's words reached Susie's ears through a jealous maze of thoughts. "Too bad you have to work. How about begging for time off and meeting me on the third wave?"

"I'll be there," she told him, laughing. As he disappeared through a door that led to the men's locker rooms, she rushed across to where her father was busy selling some loud red swim trunks to a gangly teen-aged boy. "Dad, I'd like an hour off. Can you watch the drink stand for me? Please."

Her father's blue eyes twinkled. "I'll switch Willie from the popcorn machine a while. Be careful, Susie. This young architect's not liable to have any serious ideas about a Smith. His family puts stock in a coat-of-arms and coupons to clip. He probably thinks he's way above us."

SUSIE felt her face reddening. "You keep your mind on your dry goods and stop watching my counter like a sea hawk." But the ache in her chest told her she knew her father was right. Even so, she grabbed her blue cotton bathing suit from the clothes line and rushed to a dressing room.

The suit matched her eyes, and did wonders for the tan she acquired mostly during the summer months when business was quieter. She was sorry she had forgotten to bring a comb, so she could run it through the stubborn golden curls that had a way of falling over her forehead. Well, after she plunged into the salt water her hair would look like limp seaweed anyway.

Sneaking out the side door she ran across the short strip of beach and began to swim. The Gulf was unusually rough, but the waves were meager compared to ocean breakers.

"Trying to figure out where the third wave hangs out," a loud voice shouted.

Susie brought her face out of the water, blinking the salt from her eyes. Blake swam easily toward her.

The next hour, unreal and impossible as it seemed, was heaven to Susie. To be able to swim beside Blake, catching his glance once in a while and having him smile, or not watching him but knowing he was there so close she could touch him; leaving the water long enough to catch a sandwich and stroll up the beach eating; finding a sheltered spot away from the breeze, just the spot to sun like a couple of lizards.

Blake raised up on his elbow long enough to look down at Susie and say, "Sparkling conversation, ours."

Then they both laughed and Susie said, "I like it. If we talked a lot I might discover you like all the things I don't. You might be horrid."

Blake made a face. "Thanks. I like girls who don't talk all the time. I like the outdoors. Hot weather, being near the water, fishing, dogs, airplanes. Sometimes I miss the big city, the bright lights, but I want to settle down here. And how about you?"

Susie forced his reference to "settling down" to a dark corner of her mind. Had Blake decided on Elise or Karen? A faint nausea swept over her at the idea of his repeating vows after a minister, vows that would make him another woman's husband. What would Karen or Elise be like after they married? Still wild, fickle, extravagant, social butterflies? Was that what Blake wanted?

And why should I care? she asked fiercely. He won't ask my advice.

"Hey?" Blake's deep voice implored. "Where are you?"

"I'm sorry," Susie said shortly. "I guess I was thinking I'd better get back to the pavilion."

Blake rose slowly, held out a hand, pulled Susie up beside him. "Is it too

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soon to go in the water once more? Have to get this sand off."

SHE followed him reluctantly to the water's edge, then pulled her hand from his and crashed with an angry plunge into the Gulf. Her fierce strokes lashed the water, her feet shot a foamy white spray behind her. But fast as she was, she couldn't get away from Blake or the terrifying thought that she loved him and he was far beyond her grasp, no matter how near he came.

She dived underneath the water, but as she started toward the surface she was face to face with Blake. His hands reached out for her shoulders, and he pulled her to him. Susie fought like a tarpon and managed to reach the fresh air before Blake's lips captured hers. Then she closed her eyes and stopped fighting.

Maybe I've half drowned and I'm unconscious. I'm only dreaming that Blake's kissing me. His lips are salty, and firm and determined. He loves me, little Susie Smith, whose world has been a pavilion, sand and sea and sky and only one thing missing—a man to share this uncomplicated, blue-gold world.

The pressure of Blake's lips eased, and he held Susie away, an incredulous expression on his bronzed, young face. "Just like in the bathing suit ads," he said lightly.

The strange, lonely ache started again in Susie's chest. Well, what did you expect him to say, you silly little dope? I've suddenly fallen in love with you, Miss Smith. Here's my heart and my career and my future. I've decided you were meant for sables and Cadillacs. I want you to share my world. I decided all this because I kissed you once. Not much of a kiss either. No prelude of champagne and soft lights. No strumming guitars or moonlight. No words of love.

"Just like the ads," Susie repeated flatly. "It's time for me to leave."

I should have left you long ago, Blake. I never should have let this happen, she thought bleakly.

"Susie, wait," he pleaded, shaking her by the shoulders. "Get that look out of your eyes. I wouldn't do anything in the world to hurt you. You're the sweetest girl in this town—"

"But you didn't mean to kiss me. You're sorry it happened. Is that what you wanted to say?"

Blake's jaw squared stubbornly. "Maybe I am sorry." He dropped his hands in a gesture of resignation. "Never mind, Susie. Let's head for shore."

They swam silently. Susie ran the minute her feet hit the sand. She hid in the dressing room until Blake had time to leave the pavilion. She held her soft, rounded chin higher than usual. She told Willie he could get back to the popcorn machine.

All afternoon she had trouble meeting her father's questioning glance. About four-thirty when the tourists were beginning to fold up their beach blankets to rush to their cottages and their cocktail shakers, Susie heard the familiarly throaty tones of Elise Johnson. A moment later the raven-haired playgirl dashed into the pavilion, her long legged model's stride forgotten for the moment. "May I use the phone, Susie?" she asked, her hand already on the receiver.

SUSIE nodded numbly. The telephone would have to be on the wall a few feet from the fruit juice bar. The shudder that ran through Susie she recognized as an involuntary desire to escape Elise's voice, to escape anything that might concern Blake.

But Elise's call, evidently meant for feminine ears, was devoted to the description of a new bathing suit that zipped down to the waist, a lesson in water skiing, and the latest Yacht Club gossip. Susie had just relaxed when Elise said, "Oh, Blake?

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I'm seeing him tonight. The Black and White Ball at the Belleview Biltmore. Of course, we'll have fun. He's a dream."

Susie's throat contracted until she could barely breathe, Blake and Elise. Blue lights, danceable music, a few drinks, a ride in the moonlight under royal palms. A good night kiss. Or a dozen kisses. The magic of orange blossoms and a warm Southern breeze. Maybe a proposal. Blake had said he wanted to settle down here.

"Susie, how about some orange juice?"

Elise's dark eyes and dark lustrous eyebrows appeared through a haze. Mechanically Susie reached for a paper cup.

Then a deep familiar voice reached her. "Go to a show tonight, Susie?"

Susie turned her tear dimmed gaze to the side of the stand. Gratefully she murmured, "Yes, Frank, that would be fine."

But even though the moment passed and the sound of Elise's voice faded in Susie's mind, the poignant memory of Blake's kiss remained. Frank's rambling conversation, of ships and fish and weather reports, made Susie nervous enough to scream. Returning from the movie Frank slid his arm about Susie's shoulder. She pulled away with such vehemence that his frown was as dark as September storm clouds.

"It's no use, Frank," she said quietly. "I can't have you wasting your time and money on me any longer when there's no future in it for you."

He stopped his old battered jalopy and tried to pull her to him, but she said flatly, "Get yourself another girl. Someone who would really appreciate you."

There's another man, is that it, Susie?" he said hoarsely. "You getting some fancy ideas?"

That was adding insult to injury. What if Blake's people were wealthier and he'd had more advantages? He was a man and she was a woman. Only he still treated her as a child while he dated these glamour girls.

"Take me home," she said firmly. "And do as I say. Get another girl."

After she climbed in bed in the family's neat brown shingled bungalow behind the pavilion, she lay for a long time staring out at the moon-bathed sand. Blake, Blake, the waves reminded, in gently lapping tones that splashed through her mind. A voice deep within her warned, You're a little fool. You'll never have Blake. He didn't mean to kiss you. Stop loving him or you'll keep on being hurt. You can't have him and yet you've turned Frank away. You have no one now.

Eventually the Gulf's insistent sound lulled Susie to sleep. When she first opened her eyes she could barely remember why she had been so sad. Then the memories crowded back. But this is a new day, her heart cried. Make it a good day.

EVEN before she walked across a short boardwalk to the pavilion, a plan formed in her mind. Why should she continue to act like little Susie—Why not grow up in a day, in a week? If she copied Elise or Karen perhaps it wasn't too late to make Blake fall in love.

That morning she asked her father, "May I have a new swim suit? My old one's about to fall apart."

"Sure, go ahead, kid. Anything you want."

Excitedly she studied the new stock that had just arrived in the sport shop at the far end of the pavilion. Choosing a black strapless nylon model, she decided to try on playsuits and dresses, too. When she took her place behind the snack bar she was dressed to pour cocktails instead of orange juice. In a daring off-the-shoulder blouse, white with gay embroidery, a bright red skirt, and a flaming hibiscus in her golden hair, she looked so alluring and gay she had to peer closer in the wall mirror to believe this was unsophisticated Susie. She had the whole morning to test

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the reactions of the male customers. New glints appear in masculine eyes. Three men asked for dates, but she laughed with a new abandon, telling them she was busy.

Then she saw Blake's car slide into the parking space. Panic seized her. She wanted to run away and never come back. Instead she stood quite still.

A deep voice cajoled, "Hey, little girl, where you been hiding?"

Susie whirled around. The voice came from a huge, dark-haired man approaching from the locker rooms. Susie hadn't noticed him when he entered the pavilion. Yet here he was, his elbows on the counter, his bloodshot eyes sweeping lazily over her bare shoulders. A whiff of beer made her step back.

The next moments happened so fast Susie had trouble recounting them later. She saw the man's hand reach out and grab the flower in her hair. Then there were muttered oaths as the stranger wheeled about to face a furious Blake. A fist shot out, and Blake reeled to the floor, staggered up, and let go with a left to the stranger's jaw. Susie screamed and people rushed in from the beach.

"What's going on here? Break it up."

It was Susie's father and the set of his jaw sent cold chills through her. "Get into something decent," he told her sharply. "No wonder you have men fighting over you."

As Susie turned and ran out of the pavilion, home to the bungalow, she blinked back desperate tears. All mixed up in the tears were Blake's eyes, cold and strange. Here was a Blake she didn't know. He tried to protect me, her heart sang. Yet she knew he would have done as much for any girl. What effect this fight would have on his future she hated to think.

Her worst fears were realized when the evening paper hit the stands.

YOUNG ARCHITECT HERO
IN PAVILION BRAWL

Susie sank as low on the porch swing as she could, reading the brief but complete account of the fight. Blake had knocked out two of the man's teeth. The man planned to sue. Witnesses to the fight alleged the screams of Miss Susie Smith, pavilion worker, could be heard on the beach.

Susie glanced up to find her father studying her closely. "I'm sorry I shouted

Surprise for Cinderella

By Elaine Heyward

Drucie was beautiful and lived in her aunt's fabulously wealthy household; Rex was handsome and just to look at him you could see he was right out of *The Social Register*. It seemed like such a perfect match. What no one knew, though, was that they were marrying each other for money—and both were as poor as church mice. After the wedding the truth was out, and so what was supposed to be a brilliant marriage turned out to be a heartbreaking flop. But it was still a marriage, and something had to be done about it.

Read SURPRISE FOR CINDERELLA, Elaine Heyward's full-length novel in August NEW LOVE—130 pages of romantic fiction and special features.

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at you today," he said slowly. "I guess I was frightened."

Then Susie was crying, hot, bitter tears. How could she explain that she merely wanted to make Blake notice her. Oh, he noticed her all right. Now that she was responsible for this horrid publicity, he would never forgive her.

AT EIGHT o'clock she returned from a long walk down the beach. Usually these walks in the cool evening cleared her mind of the day's problems. Tonight, however, she wearily dragged herself back to the bungalow. Staring down at her faded dungarees and plaid blouse she thought, This is a far cry from the provocative Miss Smith who has men fighting over her. That was a laugh but Susie didn't feel like laughing.

She stopped a few yards from the house. There was a man on the porch glider. She caught her breath. The police? A reporter? As she drew nearer she realized she had seen this man somewhere.

The man took off a straw hat and ran impatient fingers through his fleeting gray hair. "So you're the girl," he said in short, clipped tones. He stood up and Susie knew there was something familiar about the set of his shoulders, the shape of his head, his dark eyes.

She let out a little gasp. The eyes! "You're Blake's uncle," she said shakily.

"Are you in love with my nephew?" he demanded.

Susie's chin shot up stubbornly. "If I were, I certainly wouldn't tell you," she said decisively. "What right have you to come barging in here and asking questions? If you're angry about this afternoon, I'm sorry. I didn't ask your nephew to play hero."

Uncle John grinned and his eyes crinkled at the corners. "A girl of spirit," he said heartily. "I've been wondering for days where Blake's mind was. The newspaper yarn gave me an idea. *Cherchez la femme.* He has better taste than I gave him credit for."

Susie stared numbly. "But he loves Elise or Karen or one of those other girls he's been dating."

"Other girls, bosh. It's my fault he ever got trapped by those feather-brained play girls. I wanted him to like it here, so he'd stay. He's all the family I have. So I introduced him around and the girls took over, hounded him night and day with invitations. Like last night, Elise roped him into this Ball."

"Elise asked him!" Susie cried. "Then he didn't want to go?"

"No, I didn't," a deep voice said behind Susie. Strong fingers were on her arms pulling her closer until she leaned against his chest. "Not after that kiss yesterday."

"Blake, I—I'm sorry about today," she stammered. "I shouldn't have tried to put on a glamorous act, but I thought—"

"You thought I liked my girls that way?" he asked, his lips against her hair. "You know what ran through my mind when I saw that big lug start to get fresh. I thought, She's beautiful enough to drive any man crazy, but she's too sweet for me. I'm not worthy of her."

"Not worthy of me? Oh, Blake." Susie laughed. "I thought I wasn't worthy of you."

His uncle said, "Hmph, if I had a pretty gal like that in my arms, Blake, I wouldn't talk so darn much."

With a husky laugh Blake lifted Susie swiftly in his arms and carried her down the steps to the beach. In the cool darkness he said, "Darling, yesterday when I said I didn't mean to kiss you, I was only trying to tell you I wished our first kiss had taken place under different circumstances. I wanted it to be like this."

It's unbelieveable, Susie's heart sang as she watched Blake's lips coming closer. Little Susie Smith. Little Susie Bennett. Mrs. Blake Bennett.

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Double Play for Love

By ALICE WARNER

Pam knew she had three strikes against her when Steve met her roommate.

PAM had waited so long for the letter that when it finally arrived in mid-summer she was too excited to open it. Besides Betsy, her apartment mate, was in the bedroom putting the finishing touches on her make-up before she left for work and Pam wanted to read the letter alone. She knew she feared Betsy's reaction, but she hated to admit she was unsure of herself as far as Steve was concerned.

"I'm off," she shouted to Betsy. "See you tonight."

Betsy called in her loud, enthusiastic voice, "Let's eat out tonight. I get paid."

"We'll see," Pam replied. Maybe I'll eat out with Steve, she thought excitedly.

On the crosstown bus she opened the envelope postmarked Philadelphia.

Dear Pam,

The team heads for New York tomorrow, so I'll be able to see you for a few days. It's been such a long time that you'd better wear a hibiscus. (Get me, hibiscus yet. Talk as though we'd never left Florida!) Seriously, I haven't forgotten that corn flower hair and those blue, blue eyes, or any of those wonderful golden days. Training camp seems far away now that we're really eating, sleeping, living baseball.

Look for me Friday some time.

Love,

Steve.

This was Thursday. Pam held her breath, shutting out the noises and smells of traffic and crowds of the Big City. She could almost inhale the salt air and hear the gulls' raucous cries and see Steve's tanned, muscled body as he walked beside her on the shell strewn sands.

She didn't like to admit it was a simple beach pick-up, for Pam hated that phrase, but when she told Betsy how she answered Steve's casual, "hello," Betsy had leaned back her head and laughed. "I didn't know you had so much nerve," the brunette had commented. "You're getting brazen in your old age."

Old age! Just because Pam was two years older than Betsy, all of twenty-four,

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she didn't have to keep reminding her. "I'm going to marry before I'm twenty-five," Betsy continually remarked with a certainty, "and I don't mean any old jerk either. I want a man who really is somebody."

Pam wondered now how she had put up with Betsy's conceit this long. Maybe because of the brunette's enthusiasm, her gift of gab, her knack of meeting people and her wild extravagance every pay day. Betsy had talked herself into an assistant buyer's job in a department store, while Pam worked in a doctor's office for ten dollars less a week than Betsy received. Pay day, Betsy would splurge with a bottle of sparkling burgundy and flowers and candy. Restlessly she was always finding reasons to celebrate. So Steve's arrival would be another cause for jubilation.

PAM wished she hadn't told Betsy anything about Steve, but how could she keep the story from her? Briefly she had explained that Steve Whitman's baseball team was training in the Florida town Pam chose for a vacation spot, and Steve, ill with an attack of flu, had spent a week at the beach.

She didn't tell Betsy about the last night when Steve pulled her to him and said, "Little Pam, don't go North. I'll miss you like the very devil."

Pam said, "You'll be coming North, too. Perhaps I'll see you then?" She didn't want to leave, but she had promised Dr. Baker and she couldn't let him down. Besides, her vacation money had run out.

"You bet you will," he told her. Then he kissed her and the kiss was filled with shooting stars and orange blossoms and tropical magic.

When Pam reached New York she began cutting pictures of Steve out of the sports pages and watching for baseball pictures in the newsreels. How could she keep all this excitement inside her away from Betsy?

When the team had come to town in the spring, Steve had been in Ohio because of a death in the family. Pam, broken-hearted, tried to hide it. She told Betsy of his change in plans and Betsy acted even more disappointed.

I never realized what a celebrity chaser Betsy is, she thought frantically, now that Steve was about to appear on the scene, and Betsy would be waiting for him like a first baseman for a grounder. Ordinarily there was a hands-off agreement on each other's dates, but Betsy evidently felt this date was different. Why it should be different, Pam failed to see. Steve was merely another man—better looking than some, with his dark, close-cropped hair and his quiet hazel eyes, earning more money than some, his name in bold print on sports pages, hailed as baseball's newest hope. But he was still just the big, quiet, unassuming, unaffected man Pam wanted more than she had ever wanted anything.

I won't let Betsy near him, she planned furiously when she reached the office. I'll meet him in town.

The idea sounded logical if she could only work it out. Dr. Baker said slyly, "If I can tear you out of your dream, Pam, I'd like Mrs. Horton's card."

Pam rushed to the files, the hot blood crowding to her face and throat. Stocky, gray-haired Dr. Baker often caught her dreaming of Steve and teased her. Dreaming, she thought desperately, that's what's wrong with me. I'm a dreamer, not a fighter.

The long day finally passed and she was on the bus headed for the tiny apartment. Her head still whirled with ways and means of keeping Steve to herself.

SHE was too late. The apartment door was half open and she heard voices, Betsy's, gay and witty; Steve's, deep and

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amused. Pam stood very still, her heart pounding so loud surely they must hear. She wanted nothing but escape. She could run away, forget Steve—or stay and fight and probably lose as she had lost men before to the vivacious girls who knew all the feminine tricks she considered too silly to employ.

"I thought I heard someone coming," Steve said slowly.

Pam detected footsteps nearing the door. She had to move. She couldn't stand there like a statue. Yet her legs felt like marble. "Steve," she managed to murmur, and he was holding her by the shoulders, pulling her inside the apartment. Betsy, clad in a scarlet jersey hostess gown sat curled up on the sofa, her dark eyes bright as a tiger's. Pam, conscious of the old blue cotton dress she had worn to work and her old flat heeled shoes wished desperately she could vanish. "I look a mess," she apologized, knowing she shouldn't have called Steve's attention to the fact. "I didn't expect you until tomorrow." She sounded sorry he had arrived early. She bit her lip to keep from saying more of the wrong things.

"You didn't tell me you expected the famous Steve Whitman," Betsy scolded gently. "Trying to hide such a great man? Steve belongs to all his public."

Pam winced. Betsy had been to one baseball game that Pam knew of and she had been most interested in the hot dogs. Pam could remember her own teen-aged days in Connecticut when the neighborhood boys let her play in their ball games. Steve had laughed when she told him this, but now it would be Betsy who was the great sport fan.

"I guess I'd better dress for dinner," Betsy said swiftly. "I've been telling Steve about that new little place in the Village and he thinks he'd like to try it."

Pam's hands turned to ice. So Betsy had already planned the evening. And Steve had let her! "You two can do anything you like," she said coldly. "I have a date."

"Pam," Steve said, his expression reminding her of a hurt little boy's.

"I didn't expect you tonight," she added weakly. She wanted to wring Betsy's lovely white neck. She wanted to throw her out and never see her again. She could hear her humming merrily in the bedroom.

With a weary sigh she said, "Steve, let's sit and talk awhile."

He led her to the sofa, put his arm about her, and said, "I missed you after you left, Pam. Florida somehow lost its magic spell." He stopped suddenly and she knew he was thinking about her date tonight. I'm running away again, she told herself fiercely. I'm turning Steve over to Betsy, knowing that with her fast-talking, smooth, sugary line she'll have him wrapped around her little finger by tomorrow. There must be a better way than escape. She remembered Betsy's words, "Steve belongs to his public." If Betsy's a celebrity chaser, if she has to have someone with a big name, why not find her someone with a bigger name than Steve, Pam reasoned?

Oh, if I could only remember the sports pages I've been practically devouring. A big name, a big name.

STEVE was rambling on about tomorrow's game. Names. If I could only hang onto one of the big names.

Fred Sanborn! "Fred's really going places, isn't he?" she inserted quickly.

"Best first baseman to come off the farm teams in years," Steve said heartily. "I knew him back in Ohio."

Pam took a deep breath. "Do you think you could get in touch with him now? I—well, I've become such a baseball fiend, I'd like to meet him. Maybe he could have dinner with us."

Steve looked at her strangely. "You said you had a date."

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There was that telltale color creeping into her face again, she knew. "I've been sitting here thinking I'd be mean not to break it. After all, you haven't been in town long."

He nodded, but the hazel eyes became turbulent. "I'll get Fred. Where's your telephone? Better still, suppose I ride over to the hotel while you girls dress? He's not much of a ladies' man so I'm sure he won't be dated up. Be back in an hour."

"Fine," Pam managed to say weakly. When the door closed behind Steve, she sped to the desk drawer where she kept her clippings. It only took a moment to find a picture of Fred Sanborn. Tall, husky, blond, he was even handsomer than Steve. Pam thought happily, wait until Betsy gets a glimpse of this Adonis then she'll really be trying to get to first base!

She paused a minute over one of Steve's photographs. A stinging started behind her eyes. Remember how happy you were this morning. Now look at you, Pam Haines. Practically in tears. Stop it, you little fool. Steve's here and everything's going to be wonderful. Everything will work out fine.

She pushed open the bedroom door with a confident thrust and sailed into the room. "Mind if I borrow your black dress?" she asked Betsy lightly. Betsy, standing before the full length mirror admiring herself in a turquoise silk dress, murmured dreamily, "Take any one you like."

"Very generous of you," Pam returned. Betsy's tone indicated, It doesn't matter what you wear. Steve's attention will center on me. Oh, if Fred only doesn't let me down, Pam prayed, knowing she was counting on a total stranger to help her, yet certain that Fred would come through.

The next hour she fussed with dressing until Betsy said, "I've never seen you primp so much. You're usually waiting for me no matter how big a head start I get."

Pam hurriedly put the finishing touches on her make-up which included a brighter shade of lipstick than she ordinarily wore, and a smart gold bracelet to add glitter to Betsy's expensive black sheer. A loud knock on the door sent her heart leaping to her throat.

"I'll go," Betsy exclaimed, beating Pam into the living room. "Steve, welcome back," Pam heard her say sweetly. A low murmur of voices followed. Pam walked swiftly out of the bedroom.

A TALL blond man stood quietly beside Steve. Betsy was doing all the talking. Steve smiled hesitantly at Pam and drew her into the group. "Pam Haines, this is Fred Sanborn. I've told him you're one of his secret admirers."

Fred took Pam's hand and held it until she pulled away. "Let's bring this admiration out in the open," he said with a grin. "No secrets."

Pam felt Betsy's dark eyes on her face. She couldn't tell whether her roommate was angry or amused because Fred had been added to the party. "I'm glad you could come tonight," she said simply. "Foursomes are always nicer." She hoped Betsy got the implication that she had resented the brunette's making a threesome out of what should have been a reunion for two—Steve and Pam.

"I'm famished," Betsy said enthusiastically. She stepped closer to Steve, but he was moving toward Pam. "Let's go, honey," he told her.

Fred was glancing from one girl to the other, but he silently picked up Betsy's white summer topper and then followed Steve and Pam out of the apartment. This is more like it, Pam thought contentedly, glancing at Steve, tall and handsome, walking beside her. He put his hand on her arm as he helped her into a

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taxi, and his touch sent happy tingles through her body.

But Betsy was climbing in the back seat, letting Fred sit in the jump seat. Steve politely tried to hold a conversation with both girls. Pam shivered every time she caught the determined expression in Betsy's beautiful dark eyes. She's still after Steve. Fred's made no impression. Pam felt the old desire to run away. Instead she listened numbly to the travelogue Betsy was giving with help from Steve. Both of them had been around the world, Betsy with her family, Steve on a tramp steamer two winters ago. Betsy was trying so hard to prove how much they had in common.

She's making me look like a dull, prosaic droop who never does anything exciting, Pam thought dejectedly.

She glanced at Fred who was watching her curiously, his blue eyes thoughtful. She smiled wanly and he smiled back. He's nice, she told herself firmly. But his smile gave her no thrill. Her heart cried for Steve, sitting so close, yet being dragged so far away by Betsy's clever chatter.

During dinner Betsy continued to hold the spotlight. Fred leaned over to Pam finally and said, "Dance with me? I'm not too good at it, but it'll give me a chance to talk to you."

She nodded gratefully, but once Fred took her in his arms she wished she were back at the table. "Don't hold me so tight," she protested, but he only laughed. "I could fall for you, Pam," he told her warmly. "You're so sweet, so pretty. You're my type."

"Oh, no," she moaned. Now everything was working out wrong. Fred, counted on to amuse Betsy, was making a play for the wrong girl, giving Betsy all the time she needed to charm Steve. She could see Steve staring as though hypnotized at Betsy. How can I stand any more, she wondered?

FRED wanted to keep dancing but after two more numbers she led the way rapidly back to the table. Steve rose and she said softly, hardly recognizing her own voice, "Your turn, Mr. Whitman."

The moment he took her in his arms she knew that was where she would always be happiest, where she belonged. Yet there was a new restraint about him. They had lost the gay, carefree mood of Florida. Pam wanted to pull his face closer and kiss him and tell him how wonderful it was to see him again. She wanted to beg him to take her with him when he left for home. If she were Betsy she would be impulsive and sure of herself. But she was Pam, so she danced in silence. It was Steve who said, "Do you ever have the funny sensation of dreaming while you're awake. That's the way I've felt all evening."

Pam caught her breath. "You mean everything's strange and unreal?"

"Yes, that's it," he said quickly. "Everything's different. I mean I'd pictured this trip in my mind so often and now that I'm actually here, the dreams seem more real than the actual trip."

He's trying to tell me he doesn't love me any more, Pam thought, her throat contracting with fear so she knew she wouldn't be able to answer him. He's trying to let me down easy.

She shot Betsy a cold, angry glance. You've won, she wanted to cry. You've succeeded in winning Steve away, in erasing all his Florida memories.

"The music's stopped," she said stiffly. As she started toward the table she said, "I think maybe I'll go home early. I had a terrible day at the office and it's left me with a dreadful headache."

Steve studied her carefully. "If you want to. I'm sorry about the headache."

He doesn't believe I have even a headache. Shall I tell him my heart aches more than my head?

Fred said, when he heard she was leav-

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ing, "Let me take you home, Pam. I told Steve I could only stay out a little while tonight because I promised some of the boys I'd go slumming with them later."

Betsy added her bit with, "Do stay, Steve, and we'll finish this wonderful conversation." To Pam she explained, "We're comparing notes on Paris. Steve has a remarkable memory."

Pam frowned. "I want you to have a good time while you're here," she said gently to Steve. "Perhaps you'll eventually turn those dreams into a reality."

She was aware that Betsy looked impatient, Fred puzzled. Steve said, "Perhaps it's not too late, darling. Get some rest and I'll call you in the morning."

RIDING to the apartment Fred made two attempts to kiss Pam and when he walked her to the door he said, "What's wrong with me anyway that I don't even rate a good night kiss? You don't look like an icicle, but you act like one."

Pam said furiously, "I'm not an icicle. I just happen to be in love with Steve. Now go slumming with the boys and leave me alone."

She rushed into the apartment, slammed the door and threw herself on the sofa. Hot, bitter tears streamed down her face onto the blue brocaded satin. She hated herself for being so harsh with Fred, yet she hated his masculine conceit, too. She wanted Steve, and she had lost him. A double play, she thought wryly. Two men out of the picture. Fred and Steve. Betsy could have both of them now.

Hours later she heard a key in the lock, voices, then silence except for someone tip-toeing around. Betsy whispered, "Are you awake, Pam?"

Pam lay very still, not moving a muscle. She could hear Betsy singing softly to herself. Then everything became quiet and Pam waited for morning to come.

At six-thirty she crept out of bed and dressed without waking a peacefully sleeping Betsy. She stole out of the apartment, deciding to eat breakfast downtown—alone. The idea of cheerfully conversing with Betsy over coffee and toast was too much after the sly scheming of last night.

Pam reached the office early. Dr. Baker wouldn't be in for a half hour. The telephone rang urgently. Betsy's voice, a trifle impatient, remarked, "What's the idea of hurrying out? I wanted to talk to you."

"I had some work to catch up on," Pam said briefly. She was in no mood to argue.

"I thought you'd be weary this morning, too," Betsy added curiously. "I was sure you and Fred did the town after you left us."

Pam stared in panic at the receiver as though it had turned into a black snake. "Are you crazy?" she asked Betsy shortly.

The brunette laughed. "Certainly not. Fred's such an attractive brute, and Steve and I were certain that you two—"

"Steve and you! What's Steve got to do with this crazy talk?"

"Well, he said you asked him to bring Fred. You wanted to meet him."

PAM was too numb from shock to reply. Things were becoming clearer. Betsy had made sure Steve believed Pam and Fred wanted to be alone. Pam could just imagine the line she used to poison Steve's mind. She wanted to say, Fred was supposed to be your date. But the words refused to come.

Betsy had more to say. "Steve gave me two tickets for the game. He wants us to come."

"I can't get away," Pam said impatiently. "You go by yourself. Maybe you can learn all about the game in one afternoon."

"Pam!" Betsy protested. "Stop act-

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ing so dopey. What's gotten into you?"

Dopey! Well, I am, Pam thought mournfully. I've let Steve think I'm interested in Fred. I let Betsy take the man I love and right under my very nose, too.

She glanced up with a start. Dr. Baker was entering the office. Before he could even say, "Good morning," she blurted out, "I'd like to have the afternoon off. It's very important."

He smiled knowingly. "Tell him you can make it," he said agreeably.

"I'll be at the apartment by twelve-thirty," she told Betsy briefly and hung up before she had time to change her mind.

Pam kept remembering Steve's statement about everything seeming unreal. The next four hours she moved as one in a dream. Reaching the apartment she had barely time to change clothes before Betsy arrived. Determinedly she took a yellow cotton dress from the closet, a dress as bright as the Southern sunshine, a dress that brought back memories because she had worn it her first date with Steve. Not that he would remember. Not that he would care.

Betsy in a smart new Navy-blue sun back creation looked as chic and sophisticated as Pam looked feminine and summery. Both girls, occupied with their own thoughts, ate a quick lunch and caught a taxi to the stadium. Even the roar of the crowds as they pushed through the gates, the air of excitement, failed to reach Pam. Betsy, filled with enthusiasm said when they were seated, "I thought you loved baseball. You look bored to tears."

Pam pretended not to hear. She wished she had stayed home. Having a broken heart was horrible enough without listening to thousands of noisy spectators screaming their lungs out over a ball team, screaming for Steve Whitman and Fred Sanborn.

Someone in the grandstand shouted, "Steve's pitching. Come on, Steve. Give it to them!"

Pam's heart pounded dangerously. Watching Steve cross from the dugout to the mound, she forced back the fast rising tears. Darling, darling, I'm so proud of you, but more than that I love you. I'd keep loving you if you failed.

THREE innings later she realized in sudden panic that Steve was failing. The opponents had scored four runs. The crowd began to pound the boards in rhythm, calling for a new pitcher.

Betsy turned around several times to glare at a man directly behind them who kept persisting, "Take Whitman out!" Finally Betsy said, "What's wrong with Steve? He's no good at all. He's pitching terribly."

"Maybe you picked a has-been," Pam returned coldly.

Betsy gave a start. "Fred's coming over toward Steve. Do you think they're changing them? Oh, how wonderful! I had a feeling Fred might be the better of the two."

Pam stared at her fiercely. "How fickle can you get?" she said angrily. "Don't scratch Steve off of your list so casually though. Fred's not a pitcher."

"Oh," Betsy said flatly. "He's only talking to Steve."

The crowd roared louder. "Out with Whitman!" Then the roar died down. Fred had walked back to first base. Steve wound up and delivered. The ball whizzed over the plate. The umpire called hoarsely, "Strike one."

Pam breathed a sigh of relief as Steve struck three men out in swift succession. The booing crowd became a cheering throng. The bedlam increased as the game swept on to the sixth inning when Steve, beginning to look weary, was replaced by another pitcher. The mob shouted, "Good work, Whitman." The

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visitors were now leading by a score of eight to four.

"Can we go back to the locker room and congratulate Steve?" Betsy suggested eagerly.

"You can," Pam told her. "I'm going to watch the rest of the game and go home. Don't forget to say something nice to Fred, too. You always knew he was the better of the two." Pam hated sarcasm, but this time she couldn't refrain from making the dig.

She watched Betsy struggle to get out of the stands. She saw her talking to an usher and then a policeman. Finally she disappeared. Pam numbly watched the men come to bat, unable to see clearly because her eyes were misty. By now Betsy would have found Steve. She would be drooling all over him, making him the great hero, the most wonderful ball player of all time. He wouldn't know about the moment when her affection had shifted ruthlessly to Fred and then back to him again. At the end of the eighth inning, Pam went home. She ran up the apartment steps, her key ready to push into the lock.

"What's the rush?" a masculine voice said over her shoulder.

SHE had never fainted in her life, but this must be the way it felt. Steve grabbed her by the shoulders. "What was the big idea sending your girl friend to the clubhouse? Don't you have anything to say to me?"

"I didn't send her," Pam murmured feebly. "That was her own idea."

"And whose idea was throwing her at me last night? You had me believing you were through with me, that you preferred Fred."

Pam knew she was stammering but she couldn't stop. "I meant Fred to be for Betsy, unless you wanted it to be different. I couldn't help it if Fred fell for me. I thought Betsy had you completely captivated—"

"Pam!" Steve's eyes were wistful as he looked at her the way he had looked when she was leaving him in Florida. "I wanted everything like it used to be. Maybe I expected too much, but suddenly instead of the two of us there was an extra girl and then another man. I couldn't be rude to Betsy, and I honestly believed you liked Fred—until today when he came over to tell me what you said to him last night."

"He told you that I loved you!" Pam gasped, the telltale color rising in her cheeks.

Steve grinned. "And I went on to pitch three no hit innings. Worrying over you was the only reason I was off my stride. I love you, Pam. I should have told you long ago, before I risked losing you."

"Before I risked losing you to someone as beautiful as Betsy," she added.

"Beautiful as Betsy! Glamor is a practiced art these days, darling. Besides I need a girl who is loyal and genuine and helpful, not someone who wants to climb on the band wagon. Betsy's having dinner with one of our directors, by the way. And don't let me catch you wearing that slinky black creation again. It's hideous." A gleam came into his eyes as he looked at the yellow dress. "You look more like the Pam I knew," he said gently. "Now we can change those wonderful dreams to reality."

As he leaned forward, his lips nearing hers, she asked practically, "Who won the game?"

"You don't need to be that interested," he joked. But he added, "We did, of course—with your help."

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Super Freeze

By KYLE NEWSOM

WARNING: Give a girl a kiss and she'll expect a marriage license.

"FOR SOUPS, for gravies, for nibbling," the young announcer finished the commercial, "it's Carter's Croutons, of course! And now to get on with our show—"

Susan Smith, from the fourth row in Studio C of the Coronet Broadcasting Company, watched the announcer inattentively. Not that he wasn't handsome, vital in a dark-eyed way, and not that the Carter Giveaway Show wasn't interesting. But she was thinking, really, about the tomato plants on her Connecticut farm. She shouldn't have taken their caps off, yesterday. The June sun was much too hot for them.

"And now for the surprise prize!" Burly Mr. Carter himself had taken over, she saw, the young announcer retiring to the rear of the stage. "You were given pencil and paper when the show began, you remember," Mr. Carter went on. "You were asked the question: what was Pocahontas's married name? And only one among you knew the right answer. The winner is Miss Susan Smith!"

At her name, blared like that into a microphone, Sue nearly jumped out of her seat. And she had supposed that everybody in the studio audience would know the answer. But she *had* won, she realized, and she was being called to the stage. A bit nervous, she went forward, hoping her slip didn't show beneath the bright blue summer dress, that her tomato plants weren't wilting, and that the prize would be something she could use on the farm.

Mr. Carter, beaming, wanted to know her name, her address, what she thought of Carter's Croutons, what she was doing in New York.

"Sue Smith," she said, her voice not trembling after all. "Westview Road, Connecticut. I think Carter's Croutons are delicious. I'm in New York for the day to hire a new housekeeper for my farm."

"You're a farmer?" Mr. Carter beamed even more. "Or should I say farmerette? We ought to have television on this program, Ladies and Gentlemen, so you

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could see just how pretty a farmer can be! Curly brown hair, big blue eyes, and what a tan! Miss Smith has everything, including the surprise prize! What would you like it to be, Miss Smith?"

Sue smiled. "Something I can use on the farm," she answered. "A cream separator, a deep freezer, something like that."

Mr. Carter consulted the slip of paper in his hand, and the eyes in his round red face grew mischievous. "Sometimes the surprise prize is a surprise indeed," he said. "Miss Smith, you have won our announcer, Justin McBride!"

Two hundred people laughed out loud, uproariously. Sue felt her own face grow pale beneath its healthy tan, and she saw the announcer turn scarlet with embarrassment. Trying to look anywhere but at him, she fixed her eyes on a slim blonde girl in the first row of the audience. Among all the laughing people, only that girl wasn't even smiling. Her lips were a thin, angry line.

As soon as the laughter died down, Sue spoke. "I don't want him," she said firmly. "I—I'd like a substitute prize."

Mr. Carter boomed out, "There is no substitute for McBride. He's like Carter's Croutons, the best of his kind! And you wanted something you could use on your farm, Miss Smith. Put him to work. He's yours for one week. We provide a chaperone, of course, if need be—"

FINALLY, Sue got away, after all the flash bulbs had gone off blindingly, and all the newspaper reporters had stopped crowding around. It was nothing but a publicity stunt, she decided as she stepped into the express elevator. Carter's Croutons would make the front page. *Radio Announcer Given Away,* the headlines would show.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" a deep voice said in her ear as she left the elevator and headed for Fiftieth Street where her car was parked in a garage.

She paused impatiently, recognizing the voice. It was McBride, his jaw grim, his dark eyes determined.

"Forgetting something?" she said haughtily. "What am I forgetting?"

"Me," he replied. "I'm yours for one week, whether you like it or not."

Her small chin went even higher. "Well, I don't like it!" she said clearly. "I'm not going to be a party to any cheap publicity stunt! I—I'm going to sue Carter's Croutons, every one of the horrid little things!"

"They are horrid, aren't they?" he agreed surprisingly. "So round, so firm, so fully browned, so floaty in your soup. Go ahead and sue. But then you won't get the super superfreezer they plan to send you at the end of the week."

"A superfreezer?" Her voice was less haughty, less clear. If there was one thing she realy wanted, it was a superfreezer, practically three yards of gleaming white storage space for the fruits and vegetables she produced on the farm.

"What's in all this for you?" she asked, then, suspiciously.

"My job," Justin said. "My contract with Carter has a lot of fine print that I didn't bother to read. It says I agree to aid and abet the Carter Crouton Company in publicity plans. And I signed, fool that I am. I could use a vacation, though, I guess."

Sue's blue eyes grew as mischievous as Mr. Carter's had. "A vacation?" she said. "But of course. There's very little work to do on a Connecticut farm this time of year. Here, get in, please."

THEY HAD come to her station wagon, and Sue slid under the wheel, leaving the broad back seats to Justin McBride and the Irish housekeeper she'd found at an employment agency during the morning. The housekeeper could serve as chaperone, too, she thought. Not that she

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and Justin would need one. There was no attraction between them. None whatever. Absolutely none. Was there?

He was good-looking, of course, she admitted that. Driving, glancing in the rear-view mirror from time to time, she'd catch a glimpse of his face, lean, aristocratic, intelligent. He must be twenty-five, she thought, to her twenty. And what had that blonde girl been so angry about, she idly remembered. Perhaps she was McBride's girl friend, or had a crush on him. Young girls did, on radio announcers. Not that Sue ever would, Sue thought.

At the toll gate across the Westchester-Connecticut line, she happened to glance again in the rear-view mirror. A sleek gray convertible, top down, was coming slowly down the long hill to the toll gate. The driver was a blonde girl, her hair bound down by a red band.

"I think we're being followed," Sue said. The convertible had plenty of power to pass her ancient station wagon, but it never had. It had loitered behind, on the curves, at the toll stations.

Justin didn't even look around. "It's Paula," he said. "Paula Carter. She's supposed to keep tabs on us—for publicity purposes, of course. Can you put her up for a week, Sue?"

She was strangely unwilling, but she nodded, as last. The farmhouse had half a dozen cheerful, chintzy bedrooms, all unused since her parents had died two years ago, her two sisters married and gone away. The housekeeper, Mrs. O'Brien, Justin, Paula, Sue, each could have one, with two left over for any other Carter Crouton people who might drop around.

"It seems a lot to do for a super super-freezer," Sue murmured, weary suddenly. "It might be simpler just to go buy one."

Justin grinned. "But I wouldn't get any vacation then," he said.

She grinned too. How surprised he was going to be at five o'clock tomorrow morning! Or should she wake him at four-thirty? "We mustn't forget your vacation," she said, pleasantly malicious. "We mustn't overwork you."

"Work?" He laughed, watching smoke from his cigarette blow from the car window. "I don't know what the word means."

"You'll find out," she whispered under her breath. "I won you for a week, my boy, and it's going to be the hardest week of your life!"

The gray convertible, then, followed them up the lone road to Susan's clapboard farmhouse, and halted, its glittering bumper nosing the station wagon. Susan jumped out, and then she paused, amazed. The blonde girl was the very one who had been in the front row at the radio broadcast. Her red lips were still an angry, thin line.

Sue decided to be pleasant as long as she could. "Miss Carter?" she said. "I'll give you the front bedroom. There's a lovely view." She gestured toward upper windows that reflected the setting sun. "Justin, take Miss Carter's bags."

Mockingly, he touched a non-existent cap. "Yes, miss. Anything else, miss? Carry your superfreezer, miss?"

And Paula wasn't going to be pleasant at all. "This is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of!" she said, stamping a foot whose red sandal exactly matched her full-skirted dress. "Justin and I had a date tonight, and here we are stuck on this dinky farm! I don't see how you stand it, Miss Smith." But then her gray eyes narrowed. "You're not the type, though, for city life, are you?"

"There is a type, isn't there?" Sue answered sweetly. "Pale, too-thin, discontented looking. I see what you mean, Miss Carter." Then she turned and marched into the house, Mrs. O'Brien in tow. Paula Carter was evidently afraid that Sue and Justin McBride might be

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attracted to each other. But that was absurd, Sue thought. McBride was arrogant, supercilious, lazy. There was no attraction between them at all.

THE EVENING, then, seemed endless. Mrs. O'Brien clattered dishes in the kitchen for an interminable time, Paula wandered around, restless and complaining, Justin played the old upright piano with one incompetent finger. Sue sat quietly under the lamplight, the sweater she was knitting a soft pink pile in her lap.

"Stop that!" Paula finally said, her hands at her ears. "If there's something I can't stand, it's one-finger piano playing! Justin, really!"

Swinging around on the creaky stool, he smiled at her. "There are lots of things you can't stand, aren't there, Paula?" he asked lazily. "I'm just beginning to find that out."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" She stared at him, furious, and then she said, "I'm going up to bed. I've never been so bored in my life! Maybe we can find something to do tomorrow. Are there horses to ride, Miss Smith?"

"Of course." Sue smiled. There were two cart horses, big-footed, sway-backed. "And there's a swimming pool," she added. You could call that wide place in the river a swimming pool. "And a night-club," she went on. Joe's Tavern could be called a night-club, considering that it stayed open until half past ten.

"Good." Paula started for the stairs. "Justin and I would die of boredom with nothing to do."

"There'll be plenty for Justin to do," Sue murmured.

He began to plunk at the piano again, but after a few minutes, he rose and stretched. "How about a walk, Sue?" he said. "You could show me the farm."

She agreed. It was a lovely night, bright with moonlight, and fireflies, sweet with the scent of apple blossoms in late bloom. It was a night for love-making, really, if one happened to be in love, she thought.

"No, I guess I never have been in love," she found herself telling Justin as they strolled toward the river. "Oh, there have been boys, of course, a few kisses, but nothing serious. How about you?"

His answer was thoughtful. "I was in love with Paula for a while, I guess," he said. "Or I thought I was." Then he stopped walking and put his hands on Sue's shoulders and turned her to face him so that the moon lighted her blue, wide eyes. "You're a restful person, Sue," he said. "I think I'll fall in love with you."

He kissed her then, before she realized that he intended to. And his kiss was not the expert one she might have expected. It was boyish, surprisingly shy, an unpracticed sort of kiss. She wanted to be angry at him, but she couldn't, not after a warm, brief kiss like that. After a moment, she broke away, and they strolled on toward the river.

BACK AT the house, he kissed her again, and again it was unexpected and sweet. She was smiling up at him, half admitting herself in love, when a window slammed overhead. Sue had forgotten, she realized, that Paula had the front upstairs room, the one with the lovely view. Paula would hardly care for a view of Justin kissing another girl.

She was waiting on the landing when Sue came upstairs. Justin had gone to bed, and Mrs. O'Brien's heavy breathing could be heard from one of the rooms. Paula, her gold hair brushed down, a pink satin robe belted at her slim waist, whispered angrily.

"You're poaching, Miss Smith," she said. "Justin and I are engaged to be married. It might be in better taste to keep your kisses to yourself."

Sue's startled eyes glanced at Paula's left hand.

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"We're secretly engaged," Paula said quickly. "I don't wear my ring in public yet. But here it is."

Fumbling at the neck of the pink satin negligee, she withdrew a circlet suspended on a thin gold chain. The ring was heavy, old-fashioned, its huge diamond surrounded by seed pearls.

"It's beautiful," Sue managed to say. She'd have to have a long, long talk with her heart tonight, and admonish it not to melt at the very mention of Justin McBride's name.

What she felt for him, she thought, lying awake, was contempt, that he should speak to her of love, that he should kiss her, twice, in the moonlight, while another girl wore his ring. Tomorrow night, she plotted, he'd be so tired that he wouldn't have enough energy to kiss anybody. Not even Paula.

At four-thirty in the morning, then, she knocked briskly on his door. He groaned audibly, and she knocked again. Finally there was the sound of feet fumbling for slippers, staggering toward the door.

When he opened it, he was belting a navy-blue dressing gown over his blue striped pajamas. Even at dawn, his dark eyes could smile their appreciation of Sue in her jeans, her yellow shirt.

"What happened?" he said, his voice still thick with sleep. "House afire? McBride to the rescue?"

She smiled patiently. "This is a farm," she said. "There's work to be done."

He was already turning back to bed. "Call me at noon," he said. "I'll be glad to give you a hand."

"If you aren't dressed in five minutes and downstairs," she warned, "I'll tell Mr. Carter you aren't cooperating. He wouldn't like that, would he?"

Justin's jaw was grim. "You win," he said. "I wish I'd known, last night, you were such a slave driver."

"There are things I wish I'd known last night," she said. Then she ran downstairs. The summer morning was sunny and sweet, and there were a million things to be done.

"You mean," Justin said, half an hour later, "that I'm to put hats on tomato plants?"

Sue balanced one of a thousand paper cones on her palm. "The plants are young," she explained. "The sun would wilt them. They need protection."

"Brother," Justin said. "So do I."

HE SET to work, though, moving slowly down the rows, setting a paper cap on each small plant. For a moment, Sue thought sympathetically of the muscles he had never used before, how painful they would be by noon, by nightfall. But sympathy for Justin was Paula's province, she sternly reminded herself. She wouldn't waste sympathy, after wasting two kisses and a little bit of love.

But Paula was not sympathetic at all. She slept until lunchtime, sunbathed all afternoon, demanded at dinner that Justin take her to the tavern for drinks and dancing. His answering glance was one of sheer distaste.

"I'll die of boredom if you don't!" Paula said dramatically. "I've never been so bored in my life!"

"You could go back to New York," he pointed out wearily.

Paula glanced at Sue. "I think I'll stay," she said. "It's only six more days."

Five of the six, Sue thought, passed almost too quickly. There was the afternoon that Justin couldn't get the tractor out of the gear and was bucked all over the south field. There was his unbelieving expression the morning she told him to take all the hats off the tomato plants. The time the old cart horse took a nip out of him. The evening she sent him to help with the milking, he asked how many faucets a cow had. Then there was the sixth moon-lighted night, when she went

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to swim at the wide place in the river, and he was there.

"I—I thought you and Paula—" she said from the grassy bank. She was foolishly glad that she had worn her white suit, that her legs were long and tanned and slim.

On his back in the moon-rippled water, he trolled lazily. "Paula's packing to go home tomorrow," he said. "She misses Fifty-Second Street more than she'll miss me, it seems."

"Miss you?" Sue dabbled one slender bare foot in the water. "I'm afraid I don't understand. You're due back at the broadcasting company tomorrow, Justin. The Carter Giveaway Show—remember?"

He grinned at her, and then he swam to shore and climbed out, water dripping from his broad shoulders in diamond-like streams. "How could I forget?" he said softly. "I gave away my heart. I'm in love with you, little Susan, and you've been avoiding me. So I'm going to take a leave of absence from the show and do some heavy courting."

She felt her mouth beginning to tremble. If only this were true, if only Paula didn't have his ring on a chain around her neck. "You're engaged!" she accused him. "You're engaged to Paula. She showed me her ring. You're contemptible to make love to me when you're engaged!"

She turned, then, to run to the house, but his strong arms reached out to hold her, to swing her around. "Engaged to Paula?" he said, frowning down. "I never have been. That ring she wears was her grandmother's. Sue—it's you I love."

SHE WAS convinced, finally. They'd be married in the village next week, she agreed, and Justin could commute to his job while she managed the farm.

"I like the farm," he said. "I even think I like the work. I now know how many faucets there are on a cow, and I'm the Lily Daché of the tomato plants. I like you, Mrs. McBride, in the moonlight, in a white swimming suit."

"I like you, Mr. McBride," she answered shyly. How wonderful it was that she had known Pocahontas's married name, that she had been sensible enough to ask Justin about Paula's ring. How wonderful it was to be kissed in the moonlight and know you weren't wasting that kiss.

"All this, and a superfreezer, too," she said, smiling, as they strolled back to the house. Paula might be watching from her window, as they kissed, but it didn't matter now. Paula had lied, but she would go back to New York alone. Kiss number four was a long, long kiss, not even stopping when a certain upstairs window slammed.

The next morning, a dozen city newspapermen and photographers swarmed over the farm, interviewing Sue, Justin, even Mrs. O'Brien. They took pictures of Justin counting the faucets on a cow, trying on a tomato plant's hat, kissing Sue. Kiss number five, she thought,, was quite public, but she didn't mind at all. Not when the reporters were so excited about the story. *Announcer of Giveaway Show Gives Heart Away,* the headlines would say.

Paula sat in her convertible, watching, murmuring to the reporters now and then. Finally one of them, a bespectacled one with thinning hair, sought Sue out and began to question her.

"This is all good publicity for Carter's Croutons," he said. "A very clever stunt. But I'd like to know about your real love life. Are you engaged or anything?"

Sue's pretty mouth opened, but, for a second, words wouldn't come. "Of course I'm engaged!" she said. "To Justin McBride. It's true—really it is!"

The reporter laughed knowingly. "We understand all that," he said. "Very foxy. Such engagements last while the reporters are present. McBride will be back in

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Manhattan by noon. But what about you, I want to know. What do you get out of all this?"

SUE SHOOK her head. She didn't even want the super superfreezer anymore. She didn't want anything to do with the Carters, or Carter's Croutons, or Justin McBride. She had been used, badly, by all of them.

She was turning away from the crowd around the farmhouse door when Justin caught at her arm. "I'll be glad when these people are all gone," he whispered. "I'm planning to kiss you again."

She faced him, defiant in her blue jeans, her yellow shirt, her small, squarely set little jaw. "You make too many plans!" she said distinctly. "Publicity plans! I'm not going to fall for any more of them. You go back to New York with your Paula! I never want to see you again!"

Jerking her arm away, then, she ran from him, down the road to the wide place in the river. She'd wait there, alone, until they were all gone. Then she'd go back to the house.

The phone was ringing when she got back to the house. Wearily she answered it, and the voice of Mr. Carter boomed through the receiver. "We've had seventeen thousand complaints," he said. "Pocahontas's married name was not Mrs. John Smith, my dear."

"I never said it was," Sue told him. "My answer was Mrs. John Rolfe."

"Could you come to the program this afternoon and explain that over the air?"

She liked Mr. Carter, Sue thought. She disliked having caused him any trouble. "I suppose I could," she said.

She drove to New York, trying to concentrate on the August-green parkways, the mountain laurel, the summer skies, trying not to think of Justin. In the great marble foyer of the broadcasting company, the first person she saw was Paula Carter.

"You won after all, didn't you?" the blonde girl said. "Even when you turned him down, Justin wouldn't marry me. I asked him three times. He says he's in love with you. Imagine!"

Sue's laugh was sudden, and sweet. "It isn't too hard to imagine," she said. "Thanks, Paula. Thank you very much."

The elevator to Studio C seemed too slow. And the program was already under way when Sue arrived. She tiptoed down the aisle to a seat in the fourth row, glad that her slip didn't show under her bright blue summer dress, that her tomato plants hadn't wilted, and that Justin was standing at the microphone.

FINALLY Mr. Carter called her to the stage. Her poised answers convinced the audience that she knew all about Pocahontas, that she deserved the super superfreezer.

"I don't want a superfreezer," she said firmly. "I'd like a substitute prize."

Red-faced, Mr. Carter was amazed. "Is there a substitute for a superfreezer, Miss Smith?" he asked. "What would you like for a prize?"

Her blue eyes were mischievous, flickering toward where Justin stood, looking grim. "I'd like your announcer," she said.

Justin's dark eyes searched Sue's face, and then he smiled too. "You mean it, don't you?" he murmured. And then his arms reached out.

"We ought to have television on this program, Ladies and Gentlemen," Mr. Carter said, "so you could see just how romantic a kiss can be."

Sue didn't hear a word of it, didn't realize that this was the most public kiss of all. Justin's arms were warm around her, shutting out the rest of the world. And kiss number six, she found herself counting, was the sweetest kiss. Number seven was wonderful. Number eight was a superkiss. Number nine was fine.

And then she lost count.

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LOVE SHORT STORIES

(Continued from page 8)

can pen pals who will want to write him. I have ginger-colored hair, blue eyes. I like swimming and writing and football. Will answer all letters I receive.

Jock
(5c postage)

L-4329 REPORTER

I am a widow of forty-five, employed as a newspaper reporter. Enjoy radio contests and have won several. Also like stamp collecting and all music. Am five feet two, have dark brown hair and eyes. Don't drink or smoke, but am usually pretty lively.

- MeMe

L-4330 LIKES BEAUTY

I am a boy of nineteen with black hair and brown eyes. Am now working for the State Forestry. Would like to hear from some girls my own age. I like dancing, all sports, music and beautiful girls. Will exchange snapshots.

Scotty

L-4331 IN HIGH SCHOOL

A sixteen year old junior in high school would like very much to have a lot of pen pals. This young miss has black hair and hazel eyes. I enjoy roller skating and ice skating. I promise to answer all letters promptly.

Muggs

L-4332 SEÑORITA

This thirty year old woman has a little boy three years old. I live in the city but would like the country much better. Need a lot of friends and therefore many letters. I am of Spanish descent. Hope you pals won't disappoint me.

F.M.

L-4333 SIX FOOTER

Here is a request from South Africa for pen pals. I am a boy about six feet tall, have brown hair and blue eyes and am eighteen years old. Like dancing and do a lot of horseback riding. Like rugby, cricket and tennis. Am a motor mechanic.

Bob
(5c postage)

L-4334 YOUNGSTER

I am a girl of thirteen with brown hair and eyes. I would like to hear from pen pals of any age. I like reading and have a special interest in collecting pic-

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tures of any kind. I would like to hear from many pals about what they like and are doing.

Cookie

L-4335 POLICEMAN

This young man is six feet tall, has brown hair and eyes, and is of Indian descent. Am a college student in Police Academy and R.O.T.C. Like dancing, skating (professionally) traveling, meeting new friends. Would like to hear from girls between nineteen and twenty-six.

Victor

L-4336 CANADIAN GIRL

An eighteen year old girl, five feet two and a half inches tall with blonde hair and brown eyes, would like to hear from pals her own age. I work at electric controls, like skating, dancing, bowling and other sports. Will exchange snapshots.

Bubs

L-4337 NEEDS LETTERS

My age is twenty-four, am five feet ten and a half, have black hair and brown eyes. My hobbies are coins, stamps, sports and sometimes dancing. Am an accountant and have plenty of time to answer letters. Here's hoping I hear from you pals soon.

Steve

L-4338 FIVE FOOT TWO

A sophomore in high school would like to hear from some boys. I am a fifteen year old girl with dark brown hair and brown eyes. I am five feet two. I like sports and also like the movies and skating. Would like to have some pen pals.

Dottie

L-4339 COWHAND

I am a cowhand of fifty-three years. I love dancing and riding, also writing letters. I am a widower and will answer all letters I receive. I am five feet eleven inches and have blue eyes and brown hair. Will exchange snapshots.

Cowboy

L-4340 HOSPITALIZED

How about writing to a twenty year old girl in Ireland who has spent many months in the hospital? I am five feet seven with dark brown hair and eyes. Like to write

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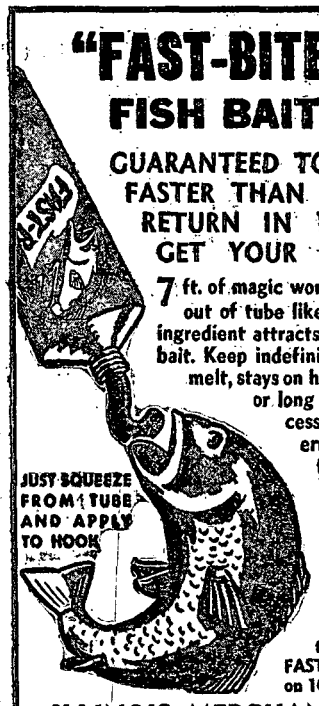

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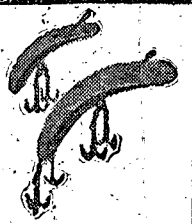

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letters, read, go to movies, especially Westerns, and collect film star's photographs.

Angela
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L-4341 PROSPECTOR

Here is an auto mechanic whose hobby is prospecting in gold, silver, lead and zinc mines. I am twenty-eight years old, five feet ten. I like sports, music and animals. Also like to read. I would like pals of all ages, men and women.

D.

L-4342 STUDIED ART

Here is an ex-sailor, twenty-three years old, five feet six inches tall with brown hair and eyes. I like swimming, roller skating, singing and drawing. Have studied art. Would like to hear from both boys and girls. Will answer all.

Charlie

L-4343 CANADIAN GIRL

I am a fifteen year old girl with brown hair and eyes, am five feet six in my socks. I like all sports especially basketball and cycling. My hobby is collecting pictures of movie stars. Am lonely and would like letters.

Jackie

L-4344 ENGINEER

A twenty-eight year old engineer writes from England: I am five feet eleven, have blue eyes, dark hair. Am pretty easy to get along with and single. Like to fish, listen to music, and get lots of mail, especially from the United States.

Clancy
(5c postage)

L-4345 SHE'S TWENTY

This twenty-year old girl, five feet six inches tall, has brown hair and eyes. I like dancing, baseball, basketball and love reading and listening to the radio. Hope I receive loads of letters from pen pals everywhere.

Helen

L-4346 DRUMMER

I am a single fellow of twenty-seven, am five feet six, have black hair and brown eyes. Am an engineer and designer by trade. Will answer all letters and exchange snaps. I play the drums and have a five piece swing band as a hobby. Like swimming, boating.

Joe

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L-4347 FROM MASSACHUSETTS

Here is a fifteen year old girl with black hair and brown eyes, who is five feet two inches tall. I like many things, but particularly dancing, movies, music, winter sports and knitting. Come on, pals, please write.

Tita

L-4348 BASHFUL

This young man is twenty, five feet ten and a half inches tall. I do construction work and am a garage mechanic. Like movies, skating, dancing, sports and many other things. Am lonesome and bashful and would like to hear from pals around my age.

George

L-4349 COUNTRY GAL

A working girl living in the country wants pals. I am a brunette of twenty-five and am five feet two. Have a cheerful disposition, don't smoke or drink. I like sports, movies and making friends. Would like to hear from all of you.

Lee

L-4350 EX-GI

I am an ex-G.I. in my early forties. Am a pianist, organist and am fond of reading biographies. I would like to hear from ex-G.I.'s who were in Africa in Canastel, Oran, Algiers and M.P.'s. Will answer all letters.

Rocky

L-4351 HILLYBILLY FAN

Here is a sixteen year old girl with blonde hair and blue eyes, five feet six and a half inches tall. Letter-writing, cooking, sports, collecting pictures, hillbilly record and hillbilly autographs are my favorite pastimes. Like traveling and dancing.

Butch

L-4352 REDHEAD

A fourteen year old girl with red hair is lonely and would like to hear from boys and girls of the same age who are lonely too. My favorite pastimes are writing, drawing, basketball and football. I like sewing and cooking also.

Gaye

L-4353 FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Please write to a lonely chap in South Africa. I am lonely and will answer all. My hobbies are stamp collecting, writing

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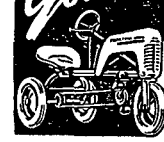
Your YOUNGSTER WILL LOVE IT!



Give your youngster a TRACTALL for the joy-ride of a lifetime! Looks just like a man-size Tractor. The perfect gift for boys, girls, up to 12 years old. Pedal-driven. Sold *only* direct from factory. **Write for Literature, FREE trial offer.**

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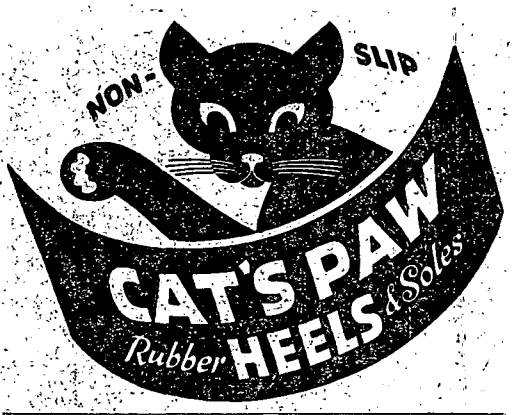

NO Selling . . . NO Demonstrating . . . . . NO Collecting . . . NO Investment

And yet, our men earn up to $200 per week listing past due accounts of retailers, doctors, schools and merchants of all kinds.

Our collection service is welcomed and needed by every business extending consumer credit.

Your only duty is to list the name, address, amount and date of last charge of debtors on which your clients are ready to give up. The rest is up to us.

You will be dealing exclusively with the more substantial citizens of each community.

If you can make an impression sufficiently dignified to cause prospective clients to permit your inspection and discussion of their accounts, this is your opportunity to earn some of the biggest money of your life. No experience necessary. Work full or part time.

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Write or wire today

President, METROPOLITAN FINANCE CORPORATION
Temple Building, Dept. P-80, Kansas City, Missouri

pen pals. I am thirteen and go to school. Would like to have pals from all over the world.

Gerald
(5c postage)

L-4354 NEWFOUNDLANDER

Boys and girls everywhere, I am a twenty year old girl, five feet with black hair and gray eyes and I'd love to hear from you. I like dancing and reading. Live thirty miles from the city and it is lonesome. Am looking forward to letters from pals my own age.

Mart
(5c postage)

L-4355 NEVER MARRIED

I am five feet eight, have blue eyes and could be called handsome. I love hunting, fishing, dancing and all sports. Never been married, but could have. I am waiting to hear from many pen pals.

Ace

L-4356 COLLECTS PITCHERS

Letters from all over the world is my goal. Am a twenty-two year old girl and my hobby is collecting pitchers. Also like to read, sew and do housework. I will exchange souvenirs with anyone who writes.

Susy

L-4357 LIKES SOUVENIRS

This eighteen year old girl's hobby is collecting souvenirs. I am five feet three, have green eyes and brown hair. Dancing is my favorite pastime, and I like movies, popular music, picnics and tennis. Would like to hear from girls and boys my type.

Helen

L-4358 FILIPINO JOURNALIST

I am a seventeen year old Filipino high school graduate. I intend to study journalism, and would like to hear from pals interested in writing. I have dark hair and eyes, and am five feet eleven. Would like letters from many countries.

Ben
(5c postage)

L-4359 GUITARIST

I am a girl of seventeen, have light brown hair and brown eyes, am four feet eleven. I like hillbilly music very much. I play the guitar. My only hobby is pen pals. Would like to hear from boys and girls all ages from everywhere.

Maria

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FULL OR PART TIME

HAVE A PROFIT MAKING BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN

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Man or woman—young or old, YOU can earn a steady income in full or spare time as an independent Kendex dealer. Amazing and almost "impossible" earnings can become a reality for you. Herbert Armstrong of Tenn. earned $202 in 9 days. C. O. Watkins of Oregon sent 92 orders in one day. You have the same opportunity to duplicate these exceptional earnings. Over one million dollars will be earned in 1950 by Kendex dealers—why not let us establish you in your own business and get a share of these wonderful earnings?

KENDEX NYLONS REPLACED FREE . . .

if they run or snag within guarantee period up to three months! Impossible? It's true! No matter what the cause—hard use or deliberate abuse—whether it is fault of the hose or the wearer—Kendex nylons are replaced FREE if they run, snag or become unfit for wear within the guarantee period. How could any woman resist a positive guarantee of satisfaction when she can obtain it without paying any more than other standard advertised brands? Kendex nylons are NOT sold in stores, so you have no competition. Complete line includes everything from heavy 70 denier service weight to gossamer luxurious ultra sheer 15 denier 60 gauge. Proportioned sizes and lengths. Latest colors plus white.

LINGERIE - ROBES - HOUSECOATS - MEN'S HOSE

In addition to the sensational Kendex nylons, you will have a complete line of glamorous lingerie, beautiful robes and housecoats plus a complete line of Kentcraft mens' hosiery guaranteed for one full year. Any pair or pairs of men's hose that does not give satisfactory wear within one year of purchase will be replaced FREE!

NATIONALLY ADVERTISED

Kendex will spend over $350,000.00 in 1950 to tell millions of readers of the advantages in buying from you. Almost every issue of Good Housekeeping, Saturday Evening Post, McCall's, Women's Home Companion and Ladies' Home Journal carry our advertising in addition to many others. Kendex has advertised in Life, Look, Collier's, etc. Awarded Good Housekeeping Seal. Thousands of orders are shipped daily from coast to coast.

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- GLAMOROUS LINGERIE
- HOUSECOATS—ROBES
- MEN'S HOSIERY

MAIL TODAY

NOTHING TO PAY

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Risk nothing! Mail coupon and we will send you, free and prepaid, complete money-making outfits including sample nylon stocking, samples of lingerie, robes, housecoats and men's hose fabrics and everything you need to immediately start making money. Complete outfits become your property even if you don't send any business. Simply write orders, we deliver and collect. Advance cash plus huge bonus. No money or experience needed. Mailing the coupon is all you need to start on the road to a 52-weeks-of-the-year high paying business of your own. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

KENDEX CORP., BABYLON 49, N. Y.

KENDEX CORP.
BABYLON 49, N.Y.

Date..... 1950

Send me, free and prepaid, everything I need to make money as a Kendex dealer, including sample stocking etc. There is nothing for me to pay now or later and I am under no obligation in accepting your money-making outfits.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

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Best tire value starts INSIDE...with

B.F.Goodrich

"RYTHM RIDE"... GIVES YOU MORE SAFETY, COMFORT, MILES

EMMETT KELLY

World's most famous circus clown, says:

"LOOK INSIDE FOR INSIDE PROOF"

"Under the Big Top the secret of top performance is teamwork," says Emmett Kelly. "And a look inside a B. F. Goodrich Silvertown shows that's true of tires as well."

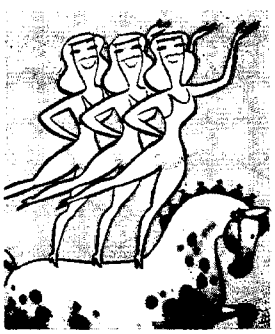
Look inside a B. F. Goodrich tire yourself! Note how the cords are precision-spaced in live rubber with no cross-threads! That's why they flex in rythm (*see below*) to give you the best tire value—"Rythm Ride!"

Yet "Rythm Ride" tires cost no more. See your B. F. Goodrich retailer for convenient terms and generous trade-in!

RESEARCH KEEPS B.F.Goodrich FIRST IN RUBBER

IF YOU CAN TELL WHICH CIRCUS RIDERS ARE BEST, YOU CAN TELL WHICH TIRE IS BEST:

1 **Every tire** has thousands of cords that flex as you ride. In most tires, these cords are hampered by *non-working* cross-threads. Result: They're *out of rythm* like the bareback rider and clowns above.



2 **B. F. Goodrich tire cords** have *no cross-threads* to hinder their action. They work *in rythm* like the circus stars above. Carry impact from one to another, smother road shock, reduce wear, cushion bumps.

3 **Most tire cords** are bunched and gapped by slender cross threads. Weak spots, "slacker cords", overworked cords result. BFG cords, instead, are sealed in live rubber, with uniform spacing and tension.

4 **Look inside—then decide.** Only B. F. Goodrich can give you "rythmic-flexing cords" in every tire for every need. See your BFG retailer. Buy now. The B. F. Goodrich Company, Akron, Ohio.

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